

AND THE
SORCERER'S STONE



J. K. ROWLING

HARRY POTTER

AND THE SORCERER'S STONE



BY

J.K. ROWLING

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*FOR JESSICA, WHO LOVES STORIES,
FOR ANNE, WHO LOVED THEM TOO;
AND FOR DI, WHO HEARD THIS ONE FIRST.*

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CHAPTER ONE



THE BOY WHO LIVED

Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. They were the last people you'd expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious, because they just didn't hold with such nonsense.

Mr. Dursley was the director of a firm called Grunnings, which made drills. He was a big, beefy man with hardly any neck, although he did have a very large mustache. Mrs. Dursley was thin and blonde and had nearly twice the usual amount of neck, which came in very useful as she spent so much of her time craning over garden fences, spying on the neighbors. The Dursleys had a small son called Dudley and in their opinion there was no finer boy anywhere.

The Dursleys had everything they wanted, but they also had a secret, and their greatest fear was that somebody would discover it. They didn't think they could bear it if anyone found out about the Potters. Mrs. Potter was Mrs. Dursley's sister, but they hadn't met for several years; in fact, Mrs. Dursley pretended she didn't have a sister, because her sister and her good-for-nothing husband were as unDursleyish as it was possible to be. The Dursleys shuddered to think what the neighbors would say if the Potters arrived in the street. The Dursleys knew that the Potters had a small son, too, but they had never even seen him. This boy was another good reason for keeping the Potters away; they didn't want Dudley mixing with a child like that.

When Mr. and Mrs. Dursley woke up on the dull, gray Tuesday our story starts, there was nothing about the cloudy sky outside to suggest that strange and mysterious things would soon be happening all over the country. Mr. Dursley hummed as he picked out his most boring tie for work, and Mrs. Dursley gossiped away happily as she wrestled a screaming Dudley into his high chair.

None of them noticed a large, tawny owl flutter past the window.

At half past eight, Mr. Dursley picked up his briefcase, pecked Mrs. Dursley on the cheek, and tried to kiss Dudley good-bye but missed, because Dudley was now having a tantrum and throwing his cereal at the walls. “Little tyke,” chortled Mr. Dursley as he left the house. He got into his car and backed out of number four’s drive.

It was on the corner of the street that he noticed the first sign of something peculiar — a cat reading a map. For a second, Mr. Dursley didn’t realize what he had seen — then he jerked his head around to look again. There was a tabby cat standing on the corner of Privet Drive, but there wasn’t a map in sight. What could he have been thinking of? It must have been a trick of the light. Mr. Dursley blinked and stared at the cat. It stared back. As Mr. Dursley drove around the corner and up the road, he watched the cat in his mirror. It was now reading the sign that said Privet Drive — no, *looking* at the sign; cats couldn’t read maps *or* signs. Mr. Dursley gave himself a little shake and put the cat out of his mind. As he drove toward town he thought of nothing except a large order of drills he was hoping to get that day.

But on the edge of town, drills were driven out of his mind by something else. As he sat in the usual morning traffic jam, he couldn’t

help noticing that there seemed to be a lot of strangely dressed people about. People in cloaks. Mr. Dursley couldn't bear people who dressed in funny clothes — the getups you saw on young people! He supposed this was some stupid new fashion. He drummed his fingers on the steering wheel and his eyes fell on a huddle of these weirdos standing quite close by. They were whispering excitedly together. Mr. Dursley was enraged to see that a couple of them weren't young at all; why, that man had to be older than he was, and wearing an emerald-green cloak! The nerve of him! But then it struck Mr. Dursley that this was probably some silly stunt — these people were obviously collecting for something . . . yes, that would be it. The traffic moved on and a few minutes later, Mr. Dursley arrived in the Grunnings parking lot, his mind back on drills.

Mr. Dursley always sat with his back to the window in his office on the ninth floor. If he hadn't, he might have found it harder to concentrate on drills that morning. *He* didn't see the owls swooping past in broad daylight, though people down in the street did; they pointed and gazed open-mouthed as owl after owl sped overhead. Most of them had never seen an owl even at nighttime. Mr. Dursley, however, had a perfectly normal, owl-free morning. He yelled at five different people. He made several important telephone calls and shouted a bit more. He was in a very good mood until lunchtime, when he thought he'd stretch his legs and walk across the road to buy himself a bun from the bakery.

He'd forgotten all about the people in cloaks until he passed a group of them next to the baker's. He eyed them angrily as he passed. He didn't know why, but they made him uneasy. This bunch were

whispering excitedly, too, and he couldn't see a single collecting tin. It was on his way back past them, clutching a large doughnut in a bag, that he caught a few words of what they were saying.

“The Potters, that's right, that's what I heard —”

“— yes, their son, Harry —”

Mr. Dursley stopped dead. Fear flooded him. He looked back at the whisperers as if he wanted to say something to them, but thought better of it.

He dashed back across the road, hurried up to his office, snapped at his secretary not to disturb him, seized his telephone, and had almost finished dialing his home number when he changed his mind. He put the receiver back down and stroked his mustache, thinking . . . no, he was being stupid. Potter wasn't such an unusual name. He was sure there were lots of people called Potter who had a son called Harry. Come to think of it, he wasn't even sure his nephew *was* called Harry. He'd never even seen the boy. It might have been Harvey. Or Harold. There was no point in worrying Mrs. Dursley; she always got so upset at any mention of her sister. He didn't blame her — if *he'd* had a sister like that . . . but all the same, those people in cloaks . . .

He found it a lot harder to concentrate on drills that afternoon and when he left the building at five o'clock, he was still so worried that he walked straight into someone just outside the door.

“Sorry,” he grunted, as the tiny old man stumbled and almost fell. It was a few seconds before Mr. Dursley realized that the man was wearing a violet cloak. He didn't seem at all upset at being almost knocked to the ground. On the contrary, his face split into a wide

smile and he said in a squeaky voice that made passersby stare, “Don’t be sorry, my dear sir, for nothing could upset me today! Rejoice, for You-Know-Who has gone at last! Even Muggles like yourself should be celebrating, this happy, happy day!”

And the old man hugged Mr. Dursley around the middle and walked off.

Mr. Dursley stood rooted to the spot. He had been hugged by a complete stranger. He also thought he had been called a Muggle, whatever that was. He was rattled. He hurried to his car and set off for home, hoping he was imagining things, which he had never hoped before, because he didn’t approve of imagination.

As he pulled into the driveway of number four, the first thing he saw — and it didn’t improve his mood — was the tabby cat he’d spotted that morning. It was now sitting on his garden wall. He was sure it was the same one; it had the same markings around its eyes.

“Shoo!” said Mr. Dursley loudly.

The cat didn’t move. It just gave him a stern look. Was this normal cat behavior? Mr. Dursley wondered. Trying to pull himself together, he let himself into the house. He was still determined not to mention anything to his wife.

Mrs. Dursley had had a nice, normal day. She told him over dinner all about Mrs. Next Door’s problems with her daughter and how Dudley had learned a new word (“Won’t!”). Mr. Dursley tried to act normally. When Dudley had been put to bed, he went into the living room in time to catch the last report on the evening news:

“And finally, bird-watchers everywhere have reported that the nation’s owls have been behaving very unusually today. Although

owls normally hunt at night and are hardly ever seen in daylight, there have been hundreds of sightings of these birds flying in every direction since sunrise. Experts are unable to explain why the owls have suddenly changed their sleeping pattern.” The newscaster allowed himself a grin. “Most mysterious. And now, over to Jim McGuffin with the weather. Going to be any more showers of owls tonight, Jim?”

“Well, Ted,” said the weatherman, “I don’t know about that, but it’s not only the owls that have been acting oddly today. Viewers as far apart as Kent, Yorkshire, and Dundee have been phoning in to tell me that instead of the rain I promised yesterday, they’ve had a downpour of shooting stars! Perhaps people have been celebrating Bonfire Night early — it’s not until next week, folks! But I can promise a wet night tonight.”

Mr. Dursley sat frozen in his armchair. Shooting stars all over Britain? Owls flying by daylight? Mysterious people in cloaks all over the place? And a whisper, a whisper about the Potters . . .

Mrs. Dursley came into the living room carrying two cups of tea. It was no good. He’d have to say something to her. He cleared his throat nervously. “Er — Petunia, dear — you haven’t heard from your sister lately, have you?”

As he had expected, Mrs. Dursley looked shocked and angry. After all, they normally pretended she didn’t have a sister.

“No,” she said sharply. “Why?”

“Funny stuff on the news,” Mr. Dursley mumbled. “Owls . . . shooting stars . . . and there were a lot of funny-looking people in town today . . .”

“So?” snapped Mrs. Dursley.

“Well, I just thought . . . maybe . . . it was something to do with . . . you know . . . *her* crowd.”

Mrs. Dursley sipped her tea through pursed lips. Mr. Dursley wondered whether he dared tell her he’d heard the name “Potter.” He decided he didn’t dare. Instead he said, as casually as he could, “Their son — he’d be about Dudley’s age now, wouldn’t he?”

“I suppose so,” said Mrs. Dursley stiffly.

“What’s his name again? Howard, isn’t it?”

“Harry. Nasty, common name, if you ask me.”

“Oh, yes,” said Mr. Dursley, his heart sinking horribly. “Yes, I quite agree.”

He didn’t say another word on the subject as they went upstairs to bed. While Mrs. Dursley was in the bathroom, Mr. Dursley crept to the bedroom window and peered down into the front garden. The cat was still there. It was staring down Privet Drive as though it were waiting for something.

Was he imagining things? Could all this have anything to do with the Potters? If it did . . . if it got out that they were related to a pair of — well, he didn’t think he could bear it.

The Dursleys got into bed. Mrs. Dursley fell asleep quickly but Mr. Dursley lay awake, turning it all over in his mind. His last, comforting thought before he fell asleep was that even if the Potters *were* involved, there was no reason for them to come near him and Mrs. Dursley. The Potters knew very well what he and Petunia thought about them and their kind. . . . He couldn’t see how he and Petunia could get mixed up in anything that might be going on — he

yawned and turned over — it couldn't affect *them*. . . .

How very wrong he was.

Mr. Dursley might have been drifting into an uneasy sleep, but the cat on the wall outside was showing no sign of sleepiness. It was sitting as still as a statue, its eyes fixed unblinkingly on the far corner of Privet Drive. It didn't so much as quiver when a car door slammed on the next street, nor when two owls swooped overhead. In fact, it was nearly midnight before the cat moved at all.

A man appeared on the corner the cat had been watching, appeared so suddenly and silently you'd have thought he'd just popped out of the ground. The cat's tail twitched and its eyes narrowed.

Nothing like this man had ever been seen on Privet Drive. He was tall, thin, and very old, judging by the silver of his hair and beard, which were both long enough to tuck into his belt. He was wearing long robes, a purple cloak that swept the ground, and high-heeled, buckled boots. His blue eyes were light, bright, and sparkling behind half-moon spectacles and his nose was very long and crooked, as though it had been broken at least twice. This man's name was Albus Dumbledore.

Albus Dumbledore didn't seem to realize that he had just arrived in a street where everything from his name to his boots was unwelcome. He was busy rummaging in his cloak, looking for something. But he did seem to realize he was being watched, because he looked up suddenly at the cat, which was still staring at him from the other end of the street. For some reason, the sight of the cat seemed to amuse him. He chuckled and muttered, "I should have known."

He found what he was looking for in his inside pocket. It seemed to be a silver cigarette lighter. He flicked it open, held it up in the air, and clicked it. The nearest street lamp went out with a little pop. He clicked it again — the next lamp flickered into darkness. Twelve times he clicked the Put-Outer, until the only lights left on the whole street were two tiny pinpricks in the distance, which were the eyes of the cat watching him. If anyone looked out of their window now, even beady-eyed Mrs. Dursley, they wouldn't be able to see anything that was happening down on the pavement. Dumbledore slipped the Put-Outer back inside his cloak and set off down the street toward number four, where he sat down on the wall next to the cat. He didn't look at it, but after a moment he spoke to it.

“Fancy seeing you here, Professor McGonagall.”

He turned to smile at the tabby, but it had gone. Instead he was smiling at a rather severe-looking woman who was wearing square glasses exactly the shape of the markings the cat had had around its eyes. She, too, was wearing a cloak, an emerald one. Her black hair was drawn into a tight bun. She looked distinctly ruffled.

“How did you know it was me?” she asked.

“My dear Professor, I've never seen a cat sit so stiffly.”

“You'd be stiff if you'd been sitting on a brick wall all day,” said Professor McGonagall.

“All day? When you could have been celebrating? I must have passed a dozen feasts and parties on my way here.”

Professor McGonagall sniffed angrily.

“Oh yes, everyone's celebrating, all right,” she said impatiently.

“You'd think they'd be a bit more careful, but no — even the Muggles

have noticed something's going on. It was on their news." She jerked her head back at the Dursleys' dark living-room window. "I heard it. Flocks of owls . . . shooting stars. . . . Well, they're not completely stupid. They were bound to notice something. Shooting stars down in Kent — I'll bet that was Dedalus Diggle. He never had much sense."

"You can't blame them," said Dumbledore gently. "We've had precious little to celebrate for eleven years."

"I know that," said Professor McGonagall irritably. "But that's no reason to lose our heads. People are being downright careless, out on the streets in broad daylight, not even dressed in Muggle clothes, swapping rumors."

She threw a sharp, sideways glance at Dumbledore here, as though hoping he was going to tell her something, but he didn't, so she went on. "A fine thing it would be if, on the very day You-Know-Who seems to have disappeared at last, the Muggles found out about us all. I suppose he really *has* gone, Dumbledore?"

"It certainly seems so," said Dumbledore. "We have much to be thankful for. Would you care for a lemon drop?"

"A *what*?"

"A lemon drop. They're a kind of Muggle sweet I'm rather fond of."

"No, thank you," said Professor McGonagall coldly, as though she didn't think this was the moment for lemon drops. "As I say, even if You-Know-Who *has* gone —"

"My dear Professor, surely a sensible person like yourself can call him by his name? All this 'You-Know-Who' nonsense — for eleven years I have been trying to persuade people to call him by his proper

name: *Voldemort*.” Professor McGonagall flinched, but Dumbledore, who was unsticking two lemon drops, seemed not to notice. “It all gets so confusing if we keep saying ‘You-Know-Who.’ I have never seen any reason to be frightened of saying Voldemort’s name.”

“I know you haven’t,” said Professor McGonagall, sounding half exasperated, half admiring. “But you’re different. Everyone knows you’re the only one You-Know- oh, all right, *Voldemort*, was frightened of.”

“You flatter me,” said Dumbledore calmly. “Voldemort had powers I will never have.”

“Only because you’re too — well — *noble* to use them.”

“It’s lucky it’s dark. I haven’t blushed so much since Madam Pomfrey told me she liked my new earmuffs.”

Professor McGonagall shot a sharp look at Dumbledore and said, “The owls are nothing next to the *rumors* that are flying around. You know what everyone’s saying? About why he’s disappeared? About what finally stopped him?”

It seemed that Professor McGonagall had reached the point she was most anxious to discuss, the real reason she had been waiting on a cold, hard wall all day, for neither as a cat nor as a woman had she fixed Dumbledore with such a piercing stare as she did now. It was plain that whatever “everyone” was saying, she was not going to believe it until Dumbledore told her it was true. Dumbledore, however, was choosing another lemon drop and did not answer.

“What they’re *saying*,” she pressed on, “is that last night Voldemort turned up in Godric’s Hollow. He went to find the Potters. The rumor is that Lily and James Potter are — are — that they’re —

dead.”

Dumbledore bowed his head. Professor McGonagall gasped.

“Lily and James . . . I can’t believe it . . . I didn’t want to believe it . . . Oh, Albus . . .”

Dumbledore reached out and patted her on the shoulder. “I know . . . I know . . .” he said heavily.

Professor McGonagall’s voice trembled as she went on. “That’s not all. They’re saying he tried to kill the Potters’ son, Harry. But — he couldn’t. He couldn’t kill that little boy. No one knows why, or how, but they’re saying that when he couldn’t kill Harry Potter, Voldemort’s power somehow broke — and that’s why he’s gone.”

Dumbledore nodded glumly.

“It’s — it’s *true*?” faltered Professor McGonagall. “After all he’s done . . . all the people he’s killed . . . he couldn’t kill a little boy? It’s just astounding . . . of all the things to stop him . . . but how in the name of heaven did Harry survive?”

“We can only guess,” said Dumbledore. “We may never know.”

Professor McGonagall pulled out a lace handkerchief and dabbed at her eyes beneath her spectacles. Dumbledore gave a great sniff as he took a golden watch from his pocket and examined it. It was a very odd watch. It had twelve hands but no numbers; instead, little planets were moving around the edge. It must have made sense to Dumbledore, though, because he put it back in his pocket and said, “Hagrid’s late. I suppose it was he who told you I’d be here, by the way?”

“Yes,” said Professor McGonagall. “And I don’t suppose you’re going to tell me *why* you’re here, of all places?”

“I’ve come to bring Harry to his aunt and uncle. They’re the only family he has left now.”

“You don’t mean — you *can’t* mean the people who live *here*?” cried Professor McGonagall, jumping to her feet and pointing at number four. “Dumbledore — you can’t. I’ve been watching them all day. You couldn’t find two people who are less like us. And they’ve got this son — I saw him kicking his mother all the way up the street, screaming for sweets. Harry Potter come and live here!”

“It’s the best place for him,” said Dumbledore firmly. “His aunt and uncle will be able to explain everything to him when he’s older. I’ve written them a letter.”

“A letter?” repeated Professor McGonagall faintly, sitting back down on the wall. “Really, Dumbledore, you think you can explain all this in a letter? These people will never understand him! He’ll be famous — a legend — I wouldn’t be surprised if today was known as Harry Potter Day in the future — there will be books written about Harry — every child in our world will know his name!”

“Exactly,” said Dumbledore, looking very seriously over the top of his half-moon glasses. “It would be enough to turn any boy’s head. Famous before he can walk and talk! Famous for something he won’t even remember! Can’t you see how much better off he’ll be, growing up away from all that until he’s ready to take it?”

Professor McGonagall opened her mouth, changed her mind, swallowed, and then said, “Yes — yes, you’re right, of course. But how is the boy getting here, Dumbledore?” She eyed his cloak suddenly as though she thought he might be hiding Harry underneath it.

“Hagrid’s bringing him.”

“You think it — *wise* — to trust Hagrid with something as important as this?”

“I would trust Hagrid with my life,” said Dumbledore.

“I’m not saying his heart isn’t in the right place,” said Professor McGonagall grudgingly, “but you can’t pretend he’s not careless. He does tend to — what was that?”

A low rumbling sound had broken the silence around them. It grew steadily louder as they looked up and down the street for some sign of a headlight; it swelled to a roar as they both looked up at the sky — and a huge motorcycle fell out of the air and landed on the road in front of them.

If the motorcycle was huge, it was nothing to the man sitting astride it. He was almost twice as tall as a normal man and at least five times as wide. He looked simply too big to be allowed, and so *wild* — long tangles of bushy black hair and beard hid most of his face, he had hands the size of trash can lids, and his feet in their leather boots were like baby dolphins. In his vast, muscular arms he was holding a bundle of blankets.

“Hagrid,” said Dumbledore, sounding relieved. “At last. And where did you get that motorcycle?”

“Borrowed it, Professor Dumbledore, sir,” said the giant, climbing carefully off the motorcycle as he spoke. “Young Sirius Black lent it to me. I’ve got him, sir.”

“No problems, were there?”

“No, sir — house was almost destroyed, but I got him out all right before the Muggles started swarmin’ around. He fell asleep as we

was flyin' over Bristol.”

Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall bent forward over the bundle of blankets. Inside, just visible, was a baby boy, fast asleep. Under a tuft of jet-black hair over his forehead they could see a curiously shaped cut, like a bolt of lightning.

“Is that where — ?” whispered Professor McGonagall.

“Yes,” said Dumbledore. “He’ll have that scar forever.”

“Couldn’t you do something about it, Dumbledore?”

“Even if I could, I wouldn’t. Scars can come in handy. I have one myself above my left knee that is a perfect map of the London Underground. Well — give him here, Hagrid — we’d better get this over with.”

Dumbledore took Harry in his arms and turned toward the Dursleys’ house.

“Could I — could I say good-bye to him, sir?” asked Hagrid. He bent his great, shaggy head over Harry and gave him what must have been a very scratchy, whiskery kiss. Then, suddenly, Hagrid let out a howl like a wounded dog.

“Shhh!” hissed Professor McGonagall, “you’ll wake the Muggles!”

“S-s-sorry,” sobbed Hagrid, taking out a large, spotted handkerchief and burying his face in it. “But I c-c-can’t stand it — Lily an’ James dead — an’ poor little Harry off ter live with Muggles —”

“Yes, yes, it’s all very sad, but get a grip on yourself, Hagrid, or we’ll be found,” Professor McGonagall whispered, patting Hagrid gingerly on the arm as Dumbledore stepped over the low garden wall

and walked to the front door. He laid Harry gently on the doorstep, took a letter out of his cloak, tucked it inside Harry's blankets, and then came back to the other two. For a full minute the three of them stood and looked at the little bundle; Hagrid's shoulders shook, Professor McGonagall blinked furiously, and the twinkling light that usually shone from Dumbledore's eyes seemed to have gone out.

"Well," said Dumbledore finally, "that's that. We've no business staying here. We may as well go and join the celebrations."

"Yeah," said Hagrid in a very muffled voice, "I'd best get this bike away. G'night, Professor McGonagall — Professor Dumbledore, sir."

Wiping his streaming eyes on his jacket sleeve, Hagrid swung himself onto the motorcycle and kicked the engine into life; with a roar it rose into the air and off into the night.

"I shall see you soon, I expect, Professor McGonagall," said Dumbledore, nodding to her. Professor McGonagall blew her nose in reply.

Dumbledore turned and walked back down the street. On the corner he stopped and took out the silver Put-Outer. He clicked it once, and twelve balls of light sped back to their street lamps so that Privet Drive glowed suddenly orange and he could make out a tabby cat slinking around the corner at the other end of the street. He could just see the bundle of blankets on the step of number four.

"Good luck, Harry," he murmured. He turned on his heel and with a swish of his cloak, he was gone.

A breeze ruffled the neat hedges of Privet Drive, which lay silent and tidy under the inky sky, the very last place you would expect

astonishing things to happen. Harry Potter rolled over inside his blankets without waking up. One small hand closed on the letter beside him and he slept on, not knowing he was special, not knowing he was famous, not knowing he would be woken in a few hours' time by Mrs. Dursley's scream as she opened the front door to put out the milk bottles, nor that he would spend the next few weeks being prodded and pinched by his cousin Dudley. . . . He couldn't know that at this very moment, people meeting in secret all over the country were holding up their glasses and saying in hushed voices: "To Harry Potter — the boy who lived!"

Harry Potter

EN DME

TOWENAAR SE STEENT



Ook beschikbaar

Harry Potter en die Kamer van Geheimenisse

HARRY POTTER

en die Towenaar se Steen



J.K. Rowling
Vertaal deur Janie Oosthuysen



Human & Rousseau
Kaapstad Pretoria Johannesburg

Die Seun Wat Bly Leef Het

Meneer en mevrou Dursley van Ligusterlaan 4 sê dikwels hulle is doodgewone mense. Hulle hou hulle nie op met vreemde of geheimsinnige verskynsels nie, want hulle duld net eenvoudig nie sulke bog nie.

Meneer Dursley is die direkteur van Kroepp, 'n maatskappy wat bore maak. Hy is 'n blok van 'n man en het feitlik nie 'n nek nie, hoewel hy 'n yslike moestas het. Mevrou Dursley is maer en blond en het amper twee maal soveel nek as 'n gewone mens, wat handig is vir iemand wat so graag oor die heining na haar bure loer. Die Dursleys het 'n klein seuntjie, Dudley, en volgens sy ouers is hy net mooi die oulikste kind wat daar is.

Die Dursleys het feitlik alles wat hul harte begeer, maar hulle het ook 'n geheim en hul grootste vrees is dat iemand sal agterkom wat dit is. Hulle sal hul oë uit hul koppe skaam as die mense van die Potters moet weet. Mevrou Potter is mevrou Dursley se suster, maar hulle het mekaar jare laas gesien. Om die waarheid te sê, mevrou Dursley maak of sy glad nie 'n suster het nie, want haar suster en die se nikswerd man is so on-Dursleyagtig as kan kom. Die Dursleys sidder by die gedagte aan wat hul bure sal sê as die Potters ooit daar sou uitslaan. Hulle weet ook dat die Potters 'n klein seuntjie het, maar hulle het die kind nog nie met 'n halwe oog gesien nie. Dié kind is nog 'n rede waarom hulle die Potters vermy; hulle wil nie hê Dudley moet met so 'n gebroedersel meng nie.

Toe meneer en mevrou Dursley wakker word op die somber grys Dinsdag waarop ons storie begin, is daar niks aan die bewolkte lug wat enigszins daarop dui dat vreemde en geheimsinnige dinge aan die broei is nie. Meneer Dursley neurie terwyl hy sy vaalste das vir werk uitsoek en mevrou Dursley skinder strykdeur terwyl sy 'n skreeuende Dudley in sy hoë eertstoeltjie bondel.

Niemand merk die groot bruin uil wat verby die venster fladder nie. Teen halfnege tel meneer Dursley sy aktetas op, pik sy vrou op die wang en probeer 'n soen op Dudley se wang plant, maar dis mis, want Dudley is in 'n vieslike bui. Hy slinger sy pap teen die mure.

“So 'n klein stouterd,” proes meneer Dursley terwyl hy buitentoe stap. Hy klim in sy kar en ry agtertoe uit die oprit voor nommer vier.

Dis eers op die hoek van die straat dat hy iets vreemds merk – 'n kat wat 'n padkaart lees. Vir 'n oomblik is meneer Dursley skoon verstom – toe ruk hy sy nek om en kyk weer. Daar staan wel 'n strepieskat op die hoek van Ligusterlaan, maar daar is nie 'n padkaart in sig nie. Wat gaan in sy kop aan? Dit moet die vals lig wees.

Meneer Dursley knipper sy oë en staar na die dier. Die kat staar terug. In die ry hou hy die kat in die truspieëltjie dop. Nou lees sy die padteken waarop *Ligusterlaan* staan – nee, sy *kyk* na die teken; katte kan tog nie kaarte of tekens lees nie. Meneer Dursley knyp homself, dwing die kat uit sy gedagtes en dink aan niks anders as die groot bestelling bore wat hy hoop om daardie dag te kry nie.

Op die rand van die dorp word alle gedagtes aan bore uit sy kop verdryf deur iets heeltemal anders. Terwyl hy in die gewone oggendverkeersknoop sit en wag, sien hy 'n klomp mense wat baie snaakse klere aanhet. Mense in mantels. Meneer Dursley hou net mooi niks van mense wat snaakse klere dra nie – die verspotte monderings wat die jongmense tog koop! Moet weer die een of ander belaglike nuwe mode wees, dink hy.

Hy sit nog so met sy vingers op die stuurwiel en trommel toe hy 'n groepie van dié mense sommer hier by hom sien staan. Hulle fluister opgewonde onder mekaar. Meneer Dursley is geskok om te sien dat 'n hele paar van hulle glad nie meer so danig jonk is nie. Daardie man moet 'n goeie ent ouer wees as hy, en die vent dra sowaar 'n smaraggroen mantel! Hoe stuitig. Dit moet 'n reklamefoefie wees, dink hy, die mense kollekteer natuurlik vir iets . . . ja, dis wat hier aan die gang is.

Die verkeer begin beweeg en 'n paar minute later ry meneer Dursley Kroepp se parkeerterrein binne. Sy gedagtes is terug by bore.

Meneer Dursley sit altyd met sy rug na die venster daar in sy kantoor op die negende verdieping. As dit nie die geval was nie, sou hy daardie dag met groot moeite op bore gekonsentreer het. Soos dit is, sien hy glad nie die uile wat helder oordag verbyvlieg nie; hoewel die mense onder in die straat hulle wel deeglik sien. *Hulle* wys en beduie en staar oopmond terwyl uil na uil oor hul koppe swiep. Die meeste van hulle het nog nooit 'n uil gesien nie, nie eens in die nag nie. Meneer Dursley, daarenteen, het 'n doodgewone, uilvrye oggend. Hy skree op vyf verskillende mense. Hy maak 'n spul belangrike oproepe en skree weer. Tot etenstyd toe is hy in 'n baie goeie bui. Toe besluit hy om sy bene te rek en 'n oliebol by die bakker oorkant die straat te gaan koop.

Die mense met die mantels het hom heeltemal ontgaan tot hy verby 'n groepie van hulle stap. In die verbygaan staar hy vererg na hulle. Hy kan dit nie verstaan nie; hulle laat hom ongemaklik voel. Hierdie spul fluister ook opgewonde en daar's nie 'n enkele kollekteerblikkie in sig nie. Dis eers toe hy terugloop met 'n yslike oliebol in 'n papiersak dat hy toevalig 'n paar woorde hoor.

“Die Potters, ja, dis reg, dis wat ek gehoor het –”

“– ja, hul seun, Harry –”

Meneer Dursley steek in sy spore vas. Hy is tot die dood toe benoud. Hy loer-loer na die fluisterende groepie mense, nes of hy iets wil sê, maar toe bedink hy hom.

Hy hardloop oor die straat, storm na sy kantoor, skree op sy sekretaresse om hom nie te steur nie, gryp die telefoon en skakel sy huis se nommer. Toe bedink hy hom. Hy sit die gehoorbuis neer en streel sy moestas en dink . . . nee, hy is heeltemal verspot. Potter is tog ’n doodgewone van. Daar moet honderde mense wees wie se van Potter is en wat ’n seun met die naam Harry het. Om die waarheid te sê, hoe meer hy daaroor dink, hoe meer twyfel hy of sy nefie se naam wel Harry is. Hy’t die seun nog nooit eens gesien nie. Dalk is dit Hendrik. Of Harvey. Dis glad nie nodig om mevrou Dursley om te krap nie, sy raak so ontsteld as haar suster se naam net genoem word. Nie dat hy haar kwalik neem nie – as hy darem so ’n suster moet hê . . . maar tog, al daardie mense in mantels . . .

Dis baie moeilik om daardie middag op bore te konsentreer en toe hy teen vyfuur by die gebou uitstap, is hy nog so omgekrap dat hy net buite die deur in iemand vasloop.

“Jammer,” brom hy toe die ouerige mannetjie struikel en amper val. Dis eers ’n hele paar sekondes later dat meneer Dursley besef dat die man ’n pers mantel dra. Hy lyk ook nie juis ontsteld na hy so amper uit die grond geloop is nie. O nee, sy gesig breek oop in ’n breë glimlag en hy sê in ’n krakerige stem wat die verbygangers verbaas laat staan:

“Dis regtig nie nodig om jammer te wees nie, vriend. Vandag kan niks my ontstel nie! Verbly jou, want Jy-Weet-Wie is uiteindelik verdryf! Selfs Moggels soos jy behoort hierdie wonderlike dag te vier!”

Toe gryp die ou man meneer Dursley om die lyf, druk hom vas en stap aan.

Meneer Dursley staan of hy geplant is. Hy is so pas deur ’n wildevreemde man omhels. Ook dink hy die man het hom ’n Moggel genoem, wat dit ook al mag wees. Hy is skoon van stryk. Hy haas hom na sy motor en sit af huis toe en hoop hy het hom net verbeel, iets wat nog nooit tevore gebeur het nie, want hy glo glad nie in goed soos verbeelding nie.

Toe hy inry by nommer vier sien hy – en dit doen niks vir sy bui nie – die strepieskat van vroeër die oggend. Sy sit op die muur om sy tuin. Hy is seker dis dieselfde kat; die merke om die oë lyk presies dieselfde.

“Skoert!” sê meneer Dursley kwaai.

Die kat roer nie. Sy kyk streng na hom. Is dit normale katgedrag? wonder meneer Dursley. Hy probeer homself regruk en gaan in by die deur. Hy is nog steeds van plan om niks vir sy vrou te sê nie.

Mevrou Dursley het ’n doodgewone dag gehad. Terwyl hulle eet, praat sy oor die bure se probleme met hul dogter en hoe Dudley ’n nuwe woord

geleer het ("Sallie!"). Meneer Dursley probeer doodgewoon optree. Toe Dudley gaan slaap, gaan hy sitkamer toe, net betyds om die laaste item op die nuus te hoor:

"Voëlkykers van oor die land maak melding van ons uile se ongewone gedrag," hoor hy. "Hoewel uile in die reël snags jag en bedags selde gesien word, het honderde uile helder oordag rondgevlieg. Kenners kan glad nie verklaar waarom die uile skielik van slaappatroon verander het nie." Die nuusleser gee 'n effense laggie. "Dis werklik eienaardig. En nou oor na Jim Meyer met die weerberig. Gaan daar vannag nog uile op ons reën, Jim?"

"Wel, Ted," antwoord die weerman, "ek kan regtig nie sê nie, maar dis nie net uile wat vreemd optree nie. Kykers van so ver as Kent, Yorkshire en Dundee het gebel om te sê dat pleks van die bui reën wat ek vir gister voorspel het, was daar 'n hele vlag verskietende sterre! Dalk het die mense Guy Fawkes 'n bietjie vroeg begin vier – dis eers volgende week, vriende! Vir vannag waarborg ek egter reën."

Meneer Dursley sit vasgenael op sy leunstoel. Verskietende sterre oor die hele land? Uile wat in die dag vlieg? Geheimsinnige mense in mantels die wêreld vol? En die ergste van alles, 'n fluistering, net 'n fluistering oor . . . *die Potters*.

Net toe kom mevrou Dursley die sitkamer binne met twee koppies tee. Meneer Dursley kan nie anders nie. Hy moet iets sê. Senuagtig maak hy keel skoon. "H'm – Petunia, skat – jy het nie dalk onlangs van jou suster gehoor nie, het jy?"

Mevrou Dursley is geskok en vererg, nes hy verwag het. Hulle maak immers nog altyd asof haar suster nie bestaan nie.

"Nee," sê sy skerp. "Hoekom?"

"Vreemde dinge oor die nuus," mompel meneer Dursley. "Uile . . . verskietende sterre . . . en daar was 'n hele spul baie eienaardige mense in die dorp vandag . . ."

"So?" sê mevrou Dursley snydend.

"Wel, ek dag . . . miskien . . . dalk het dit iets te doen met . . . jy weet . . . *haar soort*."

Mevrou Dursley dwing klein mondjies vol tee deur stywe lippe. Meneer Dursley wonder of hy dit kan waag om te sê dat hy die naam "Potter" gehoor het. Liewer nie, besluit hy dan. Pleks daarvan sê hy so ongeërg moontlik, "Hul kind – hy's omtrent so oud soos Dudley, dan nie?"

"Ek skat so," sê mevrou Dursley koud.

"Wat is sy naam nou weer? Hendrik, of hoe?"

"Harry. Nare simpel naam, as jy my vra."

"O ja," sê meneer Dursley en sy moed sak tot in sy skoene. "Ja, ek stem saam."

Hy sê nie 'n verdere woord oor die onderwerp toe hulle met die trappe

na hul slaapkamer toe gaan nie. Terwyl mevrou Dursley in die badkamer is, sluip meneer Dursley na die venster en loer af op die voortuin. Die kat is nog steeds daar. Sy staar na Ligusterlaan asof sy vir iets wag.

Verbeel hy hom? Het al hierdie goed werklik iets met die Potters te doen? En as dit so is . . . as dit moet uitkom dat *hulle* familie is van twee – nee, hy sal dit nie kan verdra nie.

Die Dursleys kruip in. Mevrou Dursley dommel gou weg, maar meneer Dursley rol onrustig rond, want alles draai om en om in sy brein. Die laaste gedagte waarmee hy homself troos, is dat selfs as die Potters wel betrokke is, hulle nie noodwendig vir hom en mevrou Dursley sal kom pla nie. Die Potters weet immers goed wat hy en Petunia van hulle en hul soort dink . . . Hy kan net nie sien hoe hy en Petunia ingesleep kan word nie. Hy gaap en rol om. Dit kan hulle nie affekteer nie . . .

Hoe verkeerd was hy nie.

Meneer Dursley kan wel onrustig aan die slaap raak, maar die kat daar buite op die muur lyk nie in die minste vaak nie. Sy sit so stil soos 'n standbeeld en staar, sonder om 'n oog te knip, na die verste hoek van Ligusterlaan. Sy roer nie 'n lit nie, nie eens toe 'n motordeur in die volgende straat toeslaan nie, ook nie toe twee uile verbyswiep nie. Dis eers teen middernag dat die kat hoegenaamd beweeg.

'n Man verskyn op die straathoek wat die kat nog die hele tyd dophou; hy verskyn so skielik en so suutjies asof hy uit die grond oprys. Die kat se stert kwispel en haar oë vernou.

Só 'n man is nog nooit in Ligusterlaan gesien nie. Hy is lank en maer en só oud dat hy sy silwer hare en baard onder sy gordel kan insteek. Hy dra 'n lang kleed, 'n pers mantel wat oor die grond sleep en hoëhakskoene met gespes. Sy blou oë is lig en blink en skitter agter halfmaanbrilglase en sy neus is baie lank en krom, asof dit al ten minste twee keer gebreek het. Hierdie man se naam is Albus Dompeldorius.

Dis of Albus Dompeldorius glad nie besef dat hy in 'n straat staan waar alles, van sy naam tot sy stewels, uiters onwelkom is nie. Hy grawe in sy mantel, nes of hy na iets soek. Dit lyk wel of hy weet dat hy dopgehou word, want hy kyk skielik na die kat wat nog steeds van oorkant die straat na hom staar. Om die een of ander rede is dit vir hom snaaks. Hy kekkellag en mompel, "Ek moes geweet het."

Hy het in sy binnesak gekry wat hy soek. Dit lyk soos 'n silwer sigaret-aansteker. Hy laat dit oopspring, hou dit in die lug en klik. Met 'n ligte plofsgeluid gaan die straatlig naaste aan hom uit. Hy klik weer – die volgende lig flikker en word donker. Twaalf keer klik hy die Uitklikker, tot die enigste lig in die straat twee speldepuntjies in die verte is – die oë van die kat wat hom dophou.

As iemand nou by hul venster sou uitkyk, selfs mevrou Dursley met haar kraalogies, sal hulle glad nie kan sien wat op die sypaadje gebeur

nie. Dompeldorius laat glip die Uitklikker terug in sy mantel en stap straat af na nommer vier. Hy gaan sit op die muur langs die kat. Hy kyk nie na haar nie, maar na 'n rukkie praat hy wel met haar.

“Interessant om jou hier te sien, professor McGonagall.”

Hy glimlag in die kat se rigting, maar die kat is weg. In stede van die kat glimlag hy vir 'n vrou met 'n streng voorkoms. Sy dra 'n vierkantige bril wat presies nes die merke om die kat se oë lyk. Sy dra ook 'n mantel – smaraggroen. Haar swart hare is saamgetrek in 'n stywe bolla. Sy lyk beslis omgekrap.

“Hoe het jy geweet dit is ek?” vra sy.

“My liewe professor, ek het 'n kat nog nooit so stokstyf sien sit nie.”

“Jy sal ook styf wees as jy die hele dag op 'n baksteenmuur moes sit,” antwoord professor McGonagall.

“Die hele dag? En dit terwyl jy kon feesvier? Op pad hierheen het ek verby ten minste 'n dosyn onthale en partytjies gestap.”

Professor McGonagall snuif vererg.

“O ja, almal vier fees,” sê sy ongeduldig. “'n Mens sou reken hulle sal 'n bietjie meer versigtig wees, maar nee – tot die Moggels weet dat iets aan die gang is. Hulle het dit op die nuus gesien!” Sy ruk haar kop terug in die rigting van die donker venster van die Dursleys se sitkamer. “Ek het alles gehoor. Swerms uile . . . verskietende sterre . . . die Moggels is nie heeltemal onnosel nie. Dit was onvermydelik dat hulle iets agterkom! Verskietende sterre, inderdaad, en dit in Kent! – ek wed dit was Dedalus Diggel. Hy't nog nooit enige verstand gehad nie.”

“Moet hom nie kwalik neem nie,” sê Dompeldorius gemoedelik. “Die laaste elf jaar was daar maar min om oor fees te vier.”

“Ek weet,” sê professor McGonagall wrewelig. “Maar dit beteken nie ons moet kop verloor nie. Mense is werklik agterlosig, op straat in die middel van die dag aan 't stories uitruil en nie eens in Moggelklere nie!”

Sy gooi 'n skerp sydelingse blik in Dompeldorius se rigting, nes of sy hoop dat hy iets sal sê, maar hy sê niks. Dus gaan sy voort: “Dit sal 'n mooi grap wees as die Moggels alles oor ons uitvind op die presiese dag dat dit lyk of ons uiteindelik ontslae is van Jy-Weet-Wie. Ek veronderstel hy is regtig weg, of hoe, Dompeldorius?”

“Dit lyk beslis so,” sê Dompeldorius. “Daar is baie om voor dankbaar te wees. Hoe lyk dit met 'n suurlemoenklontjie?”

“'n Wat?”

“'n Suurlemoenklontjie. 'n Soort Moggel-lekkergoed waarvan ek nogal baie hou.”

“Nee dankie,” sê professor McGonagall koel, so asof sy reken dat dit die allerlaaste oomblik vir suurlemoenklontjies is. “Soos ek gesê het, selfs al is Jy-Weet-Wie inderdaad weg –”

“My liewe professor, 'n verstandige mens soos jy kan hom darem seker

op sy naam noem? Al hierdie ge-’Jy-Weet-Wie’-bog! Vir elf jaar sukkel ek om mense sover te kry om sy regte naam te gebruik: *Woldemort*.” Professor McGonagall deins terug, maar Dompeldorius is besig om twee suurlemoenklontjies van mekaar af te trek en sien niks. “Dis verwarrend as almal aanhou praat van ‘Jy-Weet-Wie’. Ek kan nie verstaan hoekom mense vir die naam *Woldemort* bang is nie.”

“Ek weet jy is nie,” sê professor McGonagall, half vererg, half bewonderend. “Maar jy is anders. Almal weet jy is die enigste een vir wie *Jy-Weet* – goed, goed, *Woldemort* – versigtig is.”

“Jy vlei my,” sê Dompeldorius kalmpjes. “*Woldemort* het magte gehad wat ek nooit sal hê nie.”

“Net omdat jy te – wel – te edel is om hulle te gebruik.”

“Dis ’n geluk dat dit so donker is. Ek het laas so erg gebloos toe Madame Pomfrey gesê het sy hou van my nuwe mus.”

Professor McGonagall kyk skerp na Dompeldorius en sê, “Die uile is niks teen die gerugte wat die wêreld vol vlieg nie. Weet jy wat almal sê? Oor hoekom hy verdwyn het? Wat hom uiteindelik gekeer het?”

Dit lyk of professor McGonagall nou uitgekom het by dit waaroor sy eintlik wil praat, die rede waarom sy die hele dag op ’n koue, harde muur sit en wag het. Nóg as ’n kat, nóg as ’n vrou, het sy al ooit met sulke priemende oë na Dompeldorius gekyk. Dit is duidelik dat sy eers sal glo wat “die mense” sê, as Dompeldorius sê dat dit waar is. Dompeldorius is egter besig om nog ’n suurlemoenklontjie uit te soek en hy antwoord nie.

“Wat hulle sê,” gaan sy voort, “is dat *Woldemort* laas nag in Godric’s Hollow opgedaag het. Hy het die Potters gaan soek. Die gerug is dat Lily en James Potter – dat hulle – *dood* is.”

Dompeldorius laat sak sy kop. Professor McGonagall snak na asem.

“Lily en James . . . ek glo dit nie . . . ek wil dit nie glo nie . . . o Albus . . .”

Dompeldorius steek ’n hand uit en raak aan haar skouer. “Ek weet . . . ek weet . . .” sê hy sugtend.

Professor McGonagall se stem bewe toe sy verder praat. “Dis nie al nie. Hulle sê hy het die Potters se seun, Harry, ook probeer doodmaak. Maar – hy kon nie. Hy kon die klein seuntjie nie vermoor nie. Niemand weet presies wat gebeur het nie, maar hulle sê dat toe hy klein Harry Potter nie kon vermoor nie, het *Woldemort* se mag op die een of ander manier gebreek – en dis hoekom hy weg is.”

Dompeldorius knik somber.

“Dit – dit is die *waarheid*?” stamel professor McGonagall. “Na alles wat hy gedoen het . . . al die mense wat hy vermoor het . . . kon hy nie ’n klein seuntjie doodmaak nie? Dis verstommend . . . van alles wat hom kon stuit . . . hoe op aarde het klein Harry dit oorlewe?”

“Ons kan net raai,” sê Dompeldorius. “Dalk weet ons nooit.”

Professor McGonagall haal 'n kantsakdoek uit en druk-druk dit teen haar oë agter haar brilglase. Dompeldorius snuif lank en hard en haal 'n goue horlosie uit sy sak. Hy kyk daarna. Dit is 'n baie snaakse horlosie. Dit het twaalf wysers en glad geen syfers nie. Pleks van syfers wentel 'n klomp klein planete om die rand. Dit moet vir Dompeldorius sin maak, want hy sit dit terug in sy sak en sê, "Hagrid is laat. Terloops, ek veronderstel hy het vir jou gesê dat ek hier gaan wees?"

"Ja," sê professor McGonagall. "En ek veronderstel jy gaan nie vir my sê *hoekom* jy hier van alle plekke is nie?"

"Ek gaan Harry by sy oom en tante aflaai. Hulle is al familie wat hy nog het."

"Jy bedoel – jy bedoel seker nie die mense wat *hier* woon nie?" gil professor McGonagall, spring orent en wys na nommer vier. "Dompeldorius – jy kan nie. Ek hou hulle al die hele dag dop. Daar is nie nog twee mense wat minder soos ons is as hulle nie. En hulle het hierdie kind – hy het sy ma die hele ent pad huis toe geskop oor hy lekkers wil hê. Moet Harry Potter *hier* woon . . ."

"Dis die beste plek vir hom," sê Dompeldorius ferm. "Sy oom en tante kan alles vir hom verduidelik wanneer hy ouer is. Ek het vir hulle 'n brief geskryf."

"'n Brief?" herhaal professor McGonagall floutjies terwyl sy terugsink op die muur. "Werklik, Dompeldorius, dink jy 'n mens kan alles in 'n brief verduidelik? Hierdie mense sal hom nooit verstaan nie! Hy gaan beroemd wees – 'n legende – ek sal nie verbaas wees as hierdie dag nog as Harry Potter-dag bekend staan nie – daar gaan boeke oor hom geskryf word – elke kind in die wêreld gaan van hom weet!"

"Presies," sê Dompeldorius terwyl hy ernstig oor sy halfmaanglase kyk. "Dit sal enige kind 'n geswolle hoof gee. Beroemd, nog voor hy kan loop of praat? Beroemd oor iets wat hy nie eens kan onthou nie! Kan jy nie verstaan hoeveel beter dit is as hy grootword sonder dat hy van alles weet – tot hy ouer is en hy dinge beter kan verwerk nie?"

Professor McGonagall maak haar mond oop, verander van plan, sluk alles terug en sê, "Ja – ja, jy's reg, natuurlik. Maar hoe gaan die seun hier kom, Dompeldorius?" Sy loer na sy mantel asof sy wonder of hy dalk vir Harry daaronder wegsteek.

"Hagrid bring hom."

"Dink jy dis – *verstandig* – om Hagrid met so 'n belangrike taak te vertrou?"

"Ek sal my lewe in Hagrid se hande plaas," sê Dompeldorius.

"Ek sê nie vir 'n oomblik dat Hagrid nie 'n hart het nie," sê professor McGonagall teensinnig, "maar jy kan nie stry dat hy agterlosig is nie. Hy's geneig om – wat is dit?"

'n Lae gerammel breek die stilte om hulle. Hulle kyk op en af met die

straat vir 'n teken van kopligte, maar die gedreun word harder en harder; nou kyk hulle op in die lug, en die geraas swel uit tot 'n oorverdowende gebrul. Toe val 'n tamaai motorfiets uit die lug en land in die pad reg voor hulle.

Die motorfiets mag yslik groot wees, maar dis niks teen die man wat daarop sit nie. Hy is amper twee keer so lank as 'n gewone mens en ten minste vyf keer so breed. Hy lyk te groot om waar te wees, en so wild – lang, gekoekte swart hare en 'n woeste bos baard wat so te sê sy hele gesig toemaak. Hy het hande so groot soos vullisblikdeksels en sy voete in hul leerstewels lyk soos jong dolfyne. In twee enorme, gespieerde arms hou hy 'n bondel kombersies vas.

“Hagrid,” sê Dompeldorius en hy klink verlig. “Uiteindelik. Waar kom die motorfiets vandaan?”

“Geleen, professor Dompeldorius,” sê die reus en lig sy been versigtig oor die saal. “Jong Sirius Swardt s'n. Ek het hom, meneer.”

“Geen probleme nie?”

“Nee, meneer – die huis was feitlik verwoes, maar ek het hom uitgekry voor die Moggels oor alles begin krioel het. Hy't reeds geslaap toe ons oor Bristol vlieg.”

Dompeldorius en professor McGonagall leun oor die bondel kombersies. Styf daarin toegewikkel, sodat hy skaars sigbaar is, lê 'n klein seuntjie vas aan die slaap. Op sy voorkop, onder 'n lok pikswart hare, sien hulle 'n vreemde merk wat soos 'n weerligstraal lyk.

“Is dit waar – ?” fluister professor McGonagall.

“Ja,” sê Dompeldorius. “Hy sal vir altyd 'n litteken hê.”

“Kan jy nie iets daaraan doen nie, Dompeldorius?”

“Al kon ek, wil ek nie. In elk geval, littekens kan nuttig wees. Ek het een reg bo my linker knie wat 'n perfekte kaart is van die Londense moltreinstelsel. Wel – gee hom hier, Hagrid – ons beter klaarkry.”

Dompeldorius neem Harry in sy arms en draai na die Dursleys se huis.

“Kan ek – kan ek vir hom tot siens sê, meneer?” vra Hagrid.

Hy laat sak sy groot, harige kop oor Harry en gee hom 'n soen wat baie stekelig en krapperig moet wees. Toe uiter Hagrid 'n kreet, baie soos 'n hond wat skielik seerkry.

“Sjij!” sis professor McGonagall. “Die Moggels sal wakker word!”

“Ek's j-j-jammer,” snik Hagrid en haal 'n yslike sakdoek uit en bêre sy gesig daarin. “Ek k-k-kan dit nie verduur nie – Lily en James dood – en die arme klein Harry moet by Moggels gaan woon –”

“Ja, ja, dis baie hartseer, maar bedaar, Hagrid, iemand sal ons hoor,” fluister professor McGonagall terwyl sy Hagrid se arm vryf en Dompeldorius oor die lae tuinmuur klim en na die voordeur stap. Hy sit Harry versigtig op die boonste treetjie neer, haal 'n brief uit sy mantel, druk dit onder die komberse in en kom dan weer terug. Vir 'n volle minuut staar

die drie na die bondeltjie. Hagrid se skouers skud, professor McGonagall knipper haar oë en dis of die vonke wat gewoonlik uit Dompeldorius se oë straal, vir eers geblus is.

“So,” sê Dompeldorius uiteindelik, “is dit dan. Ons moet regtig nie langer bly nie. Ons kan net sowel by die feesvierings gaan aansluit.”

“Ja,” sê Hagrid in ’n gesmoorde stem. “Ek sal Sirius se fiets vir hom gaan teruggee. Nag, professor McGonagall, professor Dompeldorius.”

Terwyl hy sy betraande oë aan die mou van sy baadjie afvee, swaai Hagrid homself op die motorfiets en skop die enjin aan die brand; met ’n gebrul styg dit op en verdwyn in die nag.

“Ek sien jou seker binnekort weer, professor McGonagall,” sê Dompeldorius en knik vir haar. Professor McGonagall snuit haar neus as antwoord.

Dompeldorius draai om en loop af in die straat. Op die hoek gaan hy staan en haal die silwer Uitklikker uit sy sak. Hy klik dit een keer en twaalf ligballe spoed terug na die straatlampe sodat Ligusterlaan eensklaps oranje gloei en hy ’n strepieskat aan die ander kant van die straat om die hoek sien glip. Die bondeltjie komberse op die treetjie voor nommer vier kan hy net-net nog sien.

“Net die beste, Harry,” mompel hy. Hy draai op sy hak en met ’n rit-seling van sy mantel is hy weg.

’n Briesie vroetel deur die netjiese heinings langs Ligusterlaan, wat stil en rustig onder die inkswart hemel lê, die laaste plek waar ’n mens sou verwag dat verstommende dinge kan gebeur. Harry Potter woel binne-in sy komberse sonder dat hy wakker word. Een klein handjie vou om die brief langs hom en hy slaap voort, sonder om te weet dat hy iemand besonders is, sonder om te weet dat hy beroemd is, sonder om te weet dat hy binne enkele ure, wanneer mevrou Dursley die voordeur oopmaak om die melkbottels uit te sit, wakker gegil gaan word. Hoe kan hy weet dat hy die volgende paar weke deur sy nefie, Dudley, geknyp en geboelie gaan word? En hoe kan hy weet dat mense regoor die wêreld op hierdie oomblik hul glase in die lug hou en in gedempte stemme sê: “Op Harry Potter – die seun wat bly leef het!”

CHAPTER TWO



THE VANISHING GLASS

Nearly ten years had passed since the Dursleys had woken up to find their nephew on the front step, but Privet Drive had hardly changed at all. The sun rose on the same tidy front gardens and lit up the brass number four on the Dursleys' front door; it crept into their living room, which was almost exactly the same as it had been on the night when Mr. Dursley had seen that fateful news report about the owls. Only the photographs on the mantelpiece really showed how much time had passed. Ten years ago, there had been lots of pictures of what looked like a large pink beach ball wearing different-colored bonnets — but Dudley Dursley was no longer a baby, and now the photographs showed a large blond boy riding his first bicycle, on a carousel at the fair, playing a computer game with his father, being hugged and kissed by his mother. The room held no sign at all that another boy lived in the house, too.

Yet Harry Potter was still there, asleep at the moment, but not for long. His Aunt Petunia was awake and it was her shrill voice that made the first noise of the day.

“Up! Get up! Now!”

Harry woke with a start. His aunt rapped on the door again.

“Up!” she screeched. Harry heard her walking toward the kitchen and then the sound of the frying pan being put on the stove. He rolled onto his back and tried to remember the dream he had been having. It had been a good one. There had been a flying motorcycle in it. He had a funny feeling he'd had the same dream before.

His aunt was back outside the door.

“Are you up yet?” she demanded.

“Nearly,” said Harry.

“Well, get a move on, I want you to look after the bacon. And don’t you dare let it burn, I want everything perfect on Duddy’s birthday.”

Harry groaned.

“What did you say?” his aunt snapped through the door.

“Nothing, nothing . . .”

Dudley’s birthday — how could he have forgotten? Harry got slowly out of bed and started looking for socks. He found a pair under his bed and, after pulling a spider off one of them, put them on. Harry was used to spiders, because the cupboard under the stairs was full of them, and that was where he slept.

When he was dressed he went down the hall into the kitchen. The table was almost hidden beneath all Dudley’s birthday presents. It looked as though Dudley had gotten the new computer he wanted, not to mention the second television and the racing bike. Exactly why Dudley wanted a racing bike was a mystery to Harry, as Dudley was very fat and hated exercise — unless of course it involved punching somebody. Dudley’s favorite punching bag was Harry, but he couldn’t often catch him. Harry didn’t look it, but he was very fast.

Perhaps it had something to do with living in a dark cupboard, but Harry had always been small and skinny for his age. He looked even smaller and skinnier than he really was because all he had to wear were old clothes of Dudley’s, and Dudley was about four times bigger than he was. Harry had a thin face, knobbly knees, black hair, and bright green eyes. He wore round glasses held together with a lot

of Scotch tape because of all the times Dudley had punched him on the nose. The only thing Harry liked about his own appearance was a very thin scar on his forehead that was shaped like a bolt of lightning. He had had it as long as he could remember, and the first question he could ever remember asking his Aunt Petunia was how he had gotten it.

“In the car crash when your parents died,” she had said. “And don’t ask questions.”

Don’t ask questions — that was the first rule for a quiet life with the Dursleys.

Uncle Vernon entered the kitchen as Harry was turning over the bacon.

“Comb your hair!” he barked, by way of a morning greeting.

About once a week, Uncle Vernon looked over the top of his newspaper and shouted that Harry needed a haircut. Harry must have had more haircuts than the rest of the boys in his class put together, but it made no difference, his hair simply grew that way — all over the place.

Harry was frying eggs by the time Dudley arrived in the kitchen with his mother. Dudley looked a lot like Uncle Vernon. He had a large pink face, not much neck, small, watery blue eyes, and thick blond hair that lay smoothly on his thick, fat head. Aunt Petunia often said that Dudley looked like a baby angel — Harry often said that Dudley looked like a pig in a wig.

Harry put the plates of egg and bacon on the table, which was difficult as there wasn’t much room. Dudley, meanwhile, was counting his presents. His face fell.

“Thirty-six,” he said, looking up at his mother and father. “That’s two less than last year.”

“Darling, you haven’t counted Auntie Marge’s present, see, it’s here under this big one from Mummy and Daddy.”

“All right, thirty-seven then,” said Dudley, going red in the face. Harry, who could see a huge Dudley tantrum coming on, began wolfing down his bacon as fast as possible in case Dudley turned the table over.

Aunt Petunia obviously scented danger, too, because she said quickly, “And we’ll buy you another two presents while we’re out today. How’s that, popkin? *Two* more presents. Is that all right?”

Dudley thought for a moment. It looked like hard work. Finally he said slowly, “So I’ll have thirty . . . thirty . . .”

“Thirty-nine, sweetums,” said Aunt Petunia.

“Oh.” Dudley sat down heavily and grabbed the nearest parcel. “All right then.”

Uncle Vernon chuckled.

“Little tyke wants his money’s worth, just like his father. ’Atta boy, Dudley!” He ruffled Dudley’s hair.

At that moment the telephone rang and Aunt Petunia went to answer it while Harry and Uncle Vernon watched Dudley unwrap the racing bike, a video camera, a remote control airplane, sixteen new computer games, and a VCR. He was ripping the paper off a gold wristwatch when Aunt Petunia came back from the telephone looking both angry and worried.

“Bad news, Vernon,” she said. “Mrs. Figg’s broken her leg. She can’t take him.” She jerked her head in Harry’s direction.

Dudley's mouth fell open in horror, but Harry's heart gave a leap. Every year on Dudley's birthday, his parents took him and a friend out for the day, to adventure parks, hamburger restaurants, or the movies. Every year, Harry was left behind with Mrs. Figg, a mad old lady who lived two streets away. Harry hated it there. The whole house smelled of cabbage and Mrs. Figg made him look at photographs of all the cats she'd ever owned.

"Now what?" said Aunt Petunia, looking furiously at Harry as though he'd planned this. Harry knew he ought to feel sorry that Mrs. Figg had broken her leg, but it wasn't easy when he reminded himself it would be a whole year before he had to look at Tibbles, Snowy, Mr. Paws, and Tufty again.

"We could phone Marge," Uncle Vernon suggested.

"Don't be silly, Vernon, she hates the boy."

The Dursleys often spoke about Harry like this, as though he wasn't there — or rather, as though he was something very nasty that couldn't understand them, like a slug.

"What about what's-her-name, your friend — Yvonne?"

"On vacation in Majorca," snapped Aunt Petunia.

"You could just leave me here," Harry put in hopefully (he'd be able to watch what he wanted on television for a change and maybe even have a go on Dudley's computer).

Aunt Petunia looked as though she'd just swallowed a lemon.

"And come back and find the house in ruins?" she snarled.

"I won't blow up the house," said Harry, but they weren't listening.

"I suppose we could take him to the zoo," said Aunt Petunia

slowly, “. . . and leave him in the car. . . .”

“That car’s new, he’s not sitting in it alone. . . .”

Dudley began to cry loudly. In fact, he wasn’t really crying — it had been years since he’d really cried — but he knew that if he screwed up his face and wailed, his mother would give him anything he wanted.

“Dinky Duddydums, don’t cry, Mummy won’t let him spoil your special day!” she cried, flinging her arms around him.

“I . . . don’t . . . want . . . him . . . t-t-to come!” Dudley yelled between huge, pretend sobs. “He always sp-spoils everything!” He shot Harry a nasty grin through the gap in his mother’s arms.

Just then, the doorbell rang — “Oh, good Lord, they’re here!” said Aunt Petunia frantically — and a moment later, Dudley’s best friend, Piers Polkiss, walked in with his mother. Piers was a scrawny boy with a face like a rat. He was usually the one who held people’s arms behind their backs while Dudley hit them. Dudley stopped pretending to cry at once.

Half an hour later, Harry, who couldn’t believe his luck, was sitting in the back of the Dursleys’ car with Piers and Dudley, on the way to the zoo for the first time in his life. His aunt and uncle hadn’t been able to think of anything else to do with him, but before they’d left, Uncle Vernon had taken Harry aside.

“I’m warning you,” he had said, putting his large purple face right up close to Harry’s, “I’m warning you now, boy — any funny business, anything at all — and you’ll be in that cupboard from now until Christmas.”

“I’m not going to do anything,” said Harry, “honestly . . .”

But Uncle Vernon didn't believe him. No one ever did.

The problem was, strange things often happened around Harry and it was just no good telling the Dursleys he didn't make them happen.

Once, Aunt Petunia, tired of Harry coming back from the barbers looking as though he hadn't been at all, had taken a pair of kitchen scissors and cut his hair so short he was almost bald except for his bangs, which she left "to hide that horrible scar." Dudley had laughed himself silly at Harry, who spent a sleepless night imagining school the next day, where he was already laughed at for his baggy clothes and taped glasses. Next morning, however, he had gotten up to find his hair exactly as it had been before Aunt Petunia had sheared it off. He had been given a week in his cupboard for this, even though he had tried to explain that he *couldn't* explain how it had grown back so quickly.

Another time, Aunt Petunia had been trying to force him into a revolting old sweater of Dudley's (brown with orange puff balls). The harder she tried to pull it over his head, the smaller it seemed to become, until finally it might have fitted a hand puppet, but certainly wouldn't fit Harry. Aunt Petunia had decided it must have shrunk in the wash and, to his great relief, Harry wasn't punished.

On the other hand, he'd gotten into terrible trouble for being found on the roof of the school kitchens. Dudley's gang had been chasing him as usual when, as much to Harry's surprise as anyone else's, there he was sitting on the chimney. The Dursleys had received a very angry letter from Harry's headmistress telling them Harry had been climbing school buildings. But all he'd tried to do (as he shouted at Uncle Vernon through the locked door of his cupboard)

was jump behind the big trash cans outside the kitchen doors. Harry supposed that the wind must have caught him in mid-jump.

But today, nothing was going to go wrong. It was even worth being with Dudley and Piers to be spending the day somewhere that wasn't school, his cupboard, or Mrs. Figg's cabbage-smelling living room.

While he drove, Uncle Vernon complained to Aunt Petunia. He liked to complain about things: people at work, Harry, the council, Harry, the bank, and Harry were just a few of his favorite subjects. This morning, it was motorcycles.

“... roaring along like maniacs, the young hoodlums,” he said, as a motorcycle overtook them.

“I had a dream about a motorcycle,” said Harry, remembering suddenly. “It was flying.”

Uncle Vernon nearly crashed into the car in front. He turned right around in his seat and yelled at Harry, his face like a gigantic beet with a mustache: “MOTORCYCLES DON'T FLY!”

Dudley and Piers sniggered.

“I know they don't,” said Harry. “It was only a dream.”

But he wished he hadn't said anything. If there was one thing the Dursleys hated even more than his asking questions, it was his talking about anything acting in a way it shouldn't, no matter if it was in a dream or even a cartoon — they seemed to think he might get dangerous ideas.

It was a very sunny Saturday and the zoo was crowded with families. The Dursleys bought Dudley and Piers large chocolate ice creams at the entrance and then, because the smiling lady in the van had asked Harry what he wanted before they could hurry him away,

they bought him a cheap lemon ice pop. It wasn't bad, either, Harry thought, licking it as they watched a gorilla scratching its head who looked remarkably like Dudley, except that it wasn't blond.

Harry had the best morning he'd had in a long time. He was careful to walk a little way apart from the Dursleys so that Dudley and Piers, who were starting to get bored with the animals by lunchtime, wouldn't fall back on their favorite hobby of hitting him. They ate in the zoo restaurant, and when Dudley had a tantrum because his knickerbocker glory didn't have enough ice cream on top, Uncle Vernon bought him another one and Harry was allowed to finish the first.

Harry felt, afterward, that he should have known it was all too good to last.

After lunch they went to the reptile house. It was cool and dark in there, with lit windows all along the walls. Behind the glass, all sorts of lizards and snakes were crawling and slithering over bits of wood and stone. Dudley and Piers wanted to see huge, poisonous cobras and thick, man-crushing pythons. Dudley quickly found the largest snake in the place. It could have wrapped its body twice around Uncle Vernon's car and crushed it into a trash can — but at the moment it didn't look in the mood. In fact, it was fast asleep.

Dudley stood with his nose pressed against the glass, staring at the glistening brown coils.

"Make it move," he whined at his father. Uncle Vernon tapped on the glass, but the snake didn't budge.

"Do it again," Dudley ordered. Uncle Vernon rapped the glass smartly with his knuckles, but the snake just snoozed on.

“This is boring,” Dudley moaned. He shuffled away.

Harry moved in front of the tank and looked intently at the snake. He wouldn’t have been surprised if it had died of boredom itself — no company except stupid people drumming their fingers on the glass trying to disturb it all day long. It was worse than having a cupboard as a bedroom, where the only visitor was Aunt Petunia hammering on the door to wake you up; at least he got to visit the rest of the house.

The snake suddenly opened its beady eyes. Slowly, very slowly, it raised its head until its eyes were on a level with Harry’s.

It winked.

Harry stared. Then he looked quickly around to see if anyone was watching. They weren’t. He looked back at the snake and winked, too.

The snake jerked its head toward Uncle Vernon and Dudley, then raised its eyes to the ceiling. It gave Harry a look that said quite plainly:

“I get that all the time.”

“I know,” Harry murmured through the glass, though he wasn’t sure the snake could hear him. “It must be really annoying.”

The snake nodded vigorously.

“Where do you come from, anyway?” Harry asked.

The snake jabbed its tail at a little sign next to the glass. Harry peered at it.

Boa Constrictor, Brazil.

“Was it nice there?”

The boa constrictor jabbed its tail at the sign again and Harry read on: This specimen was bred in the zoo. “Oh, I see — so you’ve never

been to Brazil?"

As the snake shook its head, a deafening shout behind Harry made both of them jump. "DUDLEY! MR. DURSLEY! COME AND LOOK AT THIS SNAKE! YOU WON'T *BELIEVE* WHAT IT'S DOING!"

Dudley came waddling toward them as fast as he could.

"Out of the way, you," he said, punching Harry in the ribs. Caught by surprise, Harry fell hard on the concrete floor. What came next happened so fast no one saw how it happened — one second, Piers and Dudley were leaning right up close to the glass, the next, they had leapt back with howls of horror.

Harry sat up and gasped; the glass front of the boa constrictor's tank had vanished. The great snake was uncoiling itself rapidly, slithering out onto the floor. People throughout the reptile house screamed and started running for the exits.

As the snake slid swiftly past him, Harry could have sworn a low, hissing voice said, "Brazil, here I come. . . . Thanksss, amigo."

The keeper of the reptile house was in shock.

"But the glass," he kept saying, "where did the glass go?"

The zoo director himself made Aunt Petunia a cup of strong, sweet tea while he apologized over and over again. Piers and Dudley could only gibber. As far as Harry had seen, the snake hadn't done anything except snap playfully at their heels as it passed, but by the time they were all back in Uncle Vernon's car, Dudley was telling them how it had nearly bitten off his leg, while Piers was swearing it had tried to squeeze him to death. But worst of all, for Harry at least, was Piers calming down enough to say, "Harry was talking to it, weren't you,

Harry?”

Uncle Vernon waited until Piers was safely out of the house before starting on Harry. He was so angry he could hardly speak. He managed to say, “Go — cupboard — stay — no meals,” before he collapsed into a chair, and Aunt Petunia had to run and get him a large brandy.

Harry lay in his dark cupboard much later, wishing he had a watch. He didn’t know what time it was and he couldn’t be sure the Dursleys were asleep yet. Until they were, he couldn’t risk sneaking to the kitchen for some food.

He’d lived with the Dursleys almost ten years, ten miserable years, as long as he could remember, ever since he’d been a baby and his parents had died in that car crash. He couldn’t remember being in the car when his parents had died. Sometimes, when he strained his memory during long hours in his cupboard, he came up with a strange vision: a blinding flash of green light and a burning pain on his forehead. This, he supposed, was the crash, though he couldn’t imagine where all the green light came from. He couldn’t remember his parents at all. His aunt and uncle never spoke about them, and of course he was forbidden to ask questions. There were no photographs of them in the house.

When he had been younger, Harry had dreamed and dreamed of some unknown relation coming to take him away, but it had never happened; the Dursleys were his only family. Yet sometimes he thought (or maybe hoped) that strangers in the street seemed to know him. Very strange strangers they were, too. A tiny man in a violet top hat had bowed to him once while out shopping with Aunt Petunia and

Dudley. After asking Harry furiously if he knew the man, Aunt Petunia had rushed them out of the shop without buying anything. A wild-looking old woman dressed all in green had waved merrily at him once on a bus. A bald man in a very long purple coat had actually shaken his hand in the street the other day and then walked away without a word. The weirdest thing about all these people was the way they seemed to vanish the second Harry tried to get a closer look.

At school, Harry had no one. Everybody knew that Dudley's gang hated that odd Harry Potter in his baggy old clothes and broken glasses, and nobody liked to disagree with Dudley's gang.

Die Glas Verdwyn

Dis amper tien jaar sedert die Dursleys wakker geword en hul nefie op die trappie by die voordeur sien lê het, maar Ligusterlaan het omtrent nie verander nie. Die son skyn nog steeds op dieselfde netjiese tuine en verlig die kopernommer vier op die Dursleys se voordeur. Dit kruip tot in hul sitkamer, wat nog amper presies lyk soos daardie aand toe meneer Dursley die noodlottige nuusberig oor die uile gesien het. Net die foto's op die kaggelrak wys hoe die tyd aangestap het. Tien jaar gelede was daar 'n klomp foto's van iets soos 'n groot pienk strandbal wat 'n bonte verskeidenheid tosselhoedjies dra – maar Dudley Dursley is nie meer klein nie. Nou wys die foto's 'n frisgeboude witkopseun op sy eerste fiets, op die mallemeule by die kermis, waar hy rekenaarspeletjies saam met sy pa speel en deur sy ma gedruk en gesoen word. Daar is nie 'n teken dat daar nog 'n seun in hierdie huis woon nie.

Tog is Harry Potter nog daar, op hierdie oomblik vas aan die slaap, maar beslis nie vir lank nie. Sy tante Petunia is op en haar skril stem is die eerste geluid wat hy hoor.

“Op! Staan op! Dadelik!”

Harry ruk wakker. Weer stamp sy tante met haar vuiste teen die deur.

“Op!” krynsy. Harry hoor hoe sy kombuis toe stap en die braaipan op die stoof neerplak. Hy rol op sy rug en probeer sy droom onthou. Dit was heerlik. Daar was 'n vlieënde motorfiets in. Dis al of hy hierdie droom al tevore gehad het.

Sy tante is weer by sy deur.

“Is jy al op?” vra sy kwaai.

“Amper,” sê Harry.

“Wel, maak gou, ek wil hê jy moet die spek kom dophou. En behoede jou as jy dit laat brand, alles moet perfek wees vir Dudley se verjaardag.”

Harry kreun.

“Wat sê jy daar?” snou sy tante van agter die deur.

“Niks, niks . . .”

Dudley se verjaardag – hoe kon hy vergeet het? Harry staan stadig op en soek sy sokkies. Hy kry 'n paar onder die bed en nadat hy 'n spinnekop van

een afgetrek het, trek hy hulle aan. Harry is gewoon aan spinnekoppe. Die kas onder die trap is vol van die goed, en dit is waar hy slaap.

Toe hy sy klere aanhet, loop hy deur die voorportaal na die kombuis. Die tafel is toe onder Dudley se presente. Dit lyk of Dudley die nuwe rekenaar kry wat hy so graag wou hê, om nie te praat van die tweede televisiestel en die resiesfiets nie. Wat Dudley met 'n resiesfiets wil maak, weet nugter, want Dudley is groot en dik en hy haat oefening – behalwe as hy iemand slaan. Dudley se gunstelingslaansak is natuurlik Harry, dis nou mits hy hom kan vang. Harry lyk dalk nie so nie, maar hy kan baie vinnig hardloop.

Miskien het dit iets te doen met die feit dat hy in 'n donker kas moet slaap, maar Harry was nog altyd klein en maer vir sy ouderdom. Hy lyk nog kleiner en maerder as wat hy regtig is, want hy moet Dudley se ou klere dra en Dudley is omtrent vier keer so groot as hy. Harry het 'n skraal gesiggie, knopknieë, swart hare en heldergroen oë. Hy dra 'n ronde brillettjie wat met Sellotape aanmekaar geplak is, van al die kere dat Dudley hom al op die neus geslaan het. Al waarvan Harry aan homself hou, is die litteken op sy voorkop. Dis in die vorm van 'n weerligstraal. Die merk is al daar vir so lank as wat hy kan onthou en die eerste vraag wat hy vir tant Petunia gevra het, was hoe hy daaraan gekom het.

“Van die motorongeluk toe jou ouers dood is,” het sy gesê. “En moenie vrae vra nie.”

Moenie vrae vra nie – dit is die goue reël vir 'n rustige lewe saam met die Dursleys.

Oom Vernon stap die kombuis binne net toe Harry die spek omdraai.

“Loop kam jou hare!” blaf hy, pleks dat hy môre sê.

Ten minste een keer per week loer oom Vernon oor sy koerant en skree dat Harry sy hare moet laat sny. Harry se hare word meer gereeld gesny as al die seuns in sy klas tesame, maar dit help nie, sy hare groei eenvoudig so – die wêreld vol.

Harry is besig om die eiers te bak toe Dudley saam met sy ma by die kombuis instap. Dudley lyk baie soos oom Vernon. Hy het dieselfde groot, pienk gesig, kort nek, klein waterige blou ogies en dik blonde hare wat plat teen sy ronde, vet kop lê. Tant Petunia sê gereeld dat Dudley soos 'n engeltjie lyk – Harry reken Dudley lyk meer soos 'n vark met 'n pruik op.

Harry sit die borde met spek en eiers op die tafel neer, wat moeilik is, want daar is omtrent nie plek nie. Dudley is besig om sy presente te tel. Sy gesig val.

“Ses-en-dertig,” sê hy en kyk na sy ma en pa. “Dis twee minder as verlede jaar.”

“Maar liefie, jy het nie tant Marge se present getel nie, sien, dis hier onder die grote van Mamma en Pappa.”

“Ja, ja, so dis sewe-en-dertig,” sê Dudley en hy word rooi in die gesig. Harry wat die tekens kan lees en weet dat ’n lelike Dudley-uitbarsting aan die broei is, stop sy spek en eiers in so vinnig as hy kan, ingeval Dudley die tafel omgooi.

Tant Petunia moet ook die moles sien kom het, want sy sê vinnig, “Ons sal vir jou nog twee presente koop wanneer ons vandag uitgaan. Hoe klink dit, my skat? Nog twee presente! Sal dit help?”

Dudley dink ’n rukkie. Dit lyk na harde werk. Dan sê hy stadig, “So dan het ek . . . h’mmm . . . laa’k sien . . .”

“Nege-en-dertig presente, poplap,” sê tant Petunia.

“O.” Dudley gaan sit swaar en gryp die naaste pakkie. “Goed dan.”

Oom Vernon skud van die lag.

“Klein skurk soek waarde vir sy geld, nes sy pa. Mooi so, Dudley!” Hy frommel Dudley se hare.

Op daardie oomblik lui die telefoon en tant Petunia staan op om dit te gaan antwoord, terwyl Harry en oom Vernon kyk hoe Dudley die resies-fiets oopmaak en die videokamera, die afstandbeheerde vliegtuigie, ses-tien nuwe rekenaarspeletjies en ’n videomasjien. Hy is net besig om die papier van ’n goue polshorlosie af te skeur toe tant Petunia inkom. Sy lyk bekommerd en kwaad.

“Slegte nuus, Vernon,” sê sy. “Tant Freya het haar been gebreek. Sy kan *hom* nie vandag neem nie.” Sy beduie met haar ken in Harry se rigting.

Dudley se mond val oop van afgryse, maar Harry se hart mis ’n slag. Elke keer dat Dudley verjaar, neem sy ouers hom en ’n maat uit vir die dag, na pretparke, hamburgerplekke of na flieks. Elke jaar moet Harry by tant Freya bly, ’n mal ou vrou wat twee strate van hulle af woon. Harry haat dit daar. Die huis ruik na kool en hy moet altyd na die foto’s van al die katte wat sy ooit gehad het, kyk.

“Wat nou?” vra tant Petunia en kyk ergerlik na Harry asof dit sy skuld is. Harry weet hy moet eintlik jammer wees dat tant Freya haar been gebreek het, maar dis moeilik, veral as ’n mens weet dat jy nou eers weer oor ’n jaar na Tibbie en Wollie en Pootjies en Snoesie se foto’s hoef te kyk.

“Ons kan vir Marge bel,” stel oom Vernon voor.

“Moenie verspot wees nie, Vernon, sy haat die kind.”

Die Dursleys praat dikwels so van Harry, asof hy nie daar is nie – of liewer, asof hy iets naars is, soos ’n slak wat in elk geval nie verstaan wat hulle sê nie.

“Wat van watsenaam, jou vriendin – Yvonne.”

“Op vakansie in Majorka,” snou tant Petunia hom toe.

“Ek kan hier bly,” sê Harry hoopvol (dan kan hy tog ’n slaggie televisie kyk, na wat hy wil, en dalk selfs met Dudley se rekenaar speel).

Tant Petunia lyk soos een wat ’n suurlemoen ingesluk het.

“En terugkom en verwoesting hier aantref?” knor sy.

“Ek sal nie die huis opblaas nie,” sê Harry, maar hulle luister nie.

“Ons kan hom seker saamneem dieretuin toe,” sê tant Petunia stadig,
“... en hom in die kar los ...”

“Die motor is nuut, hy kan nie alleen daarin sit nie ...”

Net toe begin Dudley hartverskeurend huil. Hy huil nie regtig nie, hy't jare laas regtig gehuil, maar hy weet dat as hy sy gesig op 'n plooi trek en hard kerm, sal sy ma hom gee net wat hy wil hê.

“My klein skattebolletjie, moenie huil nie, Mammie sal nie dat hy jou spesiale dag bederf nie!” roep tant Petunia uit en gooi haar arms om hom.

“Ek ... wil ... nie ... hê ... hy ... moet ... k-k-kom nie!” gil Dudley tussen yslike gemaakte snikke deur. “Hy b-bederf altyd alles!” Van onder sy ma se arm grynslag hy vir Harry.

Net toe lui die voordeurklokkie – “Goeie, griet, hulle's hier!” sê tant Petunia benoud – en 'n oomblik later stap Dudley se beste maat, Piers Polkiss, en sy ma in. Piers is net vel en been en sy gesig lyk soos 'n rot s'n. Dis hy wat die kinders se arms agter hul rûe vashou sodat Dudley hulle kan slaan. Dudley hou dadelik op met skree.

'n Halfuur later sit Harry, wat sy oë nie kan glo nie, agter in die Dursleys se kar saam met Dudley en Piers, op pad dieretuin toe, vir die heel eerste keer in sy lewe. Sy tante en oom kon nie dink wat anders om met hom te doen nie, maar voor hul vertrek het oom Vernon vir Harry eenkant toe geneem.

“Ek waarsku jou,” het hy gesê en sy groot pers gesig in Harry s'n gedruk. “Ek waarsku jou – enige moleste van watter aard ook al – en jy is in daardie kas van nou af tot Krismis toe.”

“Maar ek gaan niks doen nie,” sê Harry, “ek belowe ...”

Oom Vernon glo hom nie. Niemand glo hom ooit nie.

Die probleem is dat daar dikwels snaakse dinge gebeur wanneer Harry in die rondte is en dit help nie om vir die Dursleys te sê dat dit nie sy skuld is nie.

Eenkeer was tant Petunia siek en sat daarvan dat Harry van die haar-kapper af kom en lyk asof hy glad nie daar was nie. Sy het die kombuis-skêr gegryp en sy hare so kort geknip, dit het gelyk of hy bles is. Sy het net 'n kort kuifie gelos om “daardie aaklige litteken weg te steek”. Dudley het homself amper slap gelag en Harry kon nie slaap by die gedagte aan die volgende dag by die skool, waar almal al klaar vir hom lag oor sy sakkerige klere en gegomde brilletjie nie. Maar die volgende oggend toe hy opstaan, lyk sy hare presies net soos voor tant Petunia dit getakel het. Daarvoor het hy 'n week in die kas gekry, hoewel hy kliphard probeer verduidelik het dat hy *regtig* nie weet hoe sy hare so vinnig kon terug-groei nie.

Op 'n ander keer het tant Petunia hom in 'n walglike trui van Dudley (bruin met oranje klossies) probeer indwing. Hoe harder sy probeer het om dit oor sy kop te trek, hoe kleiner het dit geword, tot dit uiteindelik skaars vir 'n handskoenpop sou pas, wat nog te sê vir Harry. Tant Petunia het gereken dit moet in die was gekrimp het, en tot sy verligting is Harry nie gestraf nie.

Harry was egter diep in die sop toe hy op die skool se dak beland het. Dudley en sy bende het hom soos gewoonlik gejaag, en toe skielik, ook tot Harry se verbasing, sit hy bo-op die skoorsteen. Die Dursleys het 'n brander van 'n brief van Harry se skoolhoof af gekry. Daarin het gestaan dat Harry op die skool se geboue rondklouter. Al wat hy probeer doen het (soos Harry deur die kas vir oom Vernon geskree het), was om agter die groot dromme net buite die kombuisdeur in te spring. Harry reken die wind moet hom geskep het net toe hy spring.

Vandag mag niks skeef loop nie. Dis selfs die moeite werd om die hele dag saam met Dudley en Piers te spandeer, net om 'n slag iewers anders te kan wees. Nie by die skool nie, ook nie in die kas nie en ook nie in tant Freya se voorkamer wat na kool ruik nie.

In die ry kla oom Vernon teenoor tant Petunia. Hy hou van kla: die mense by die werk, Harry, die stadsraad, Harry, die bank en Harry is net 'n paar van sy gunstelingonderwerpe. Vanoggend is dit motorfiets.

“... jaag soos mal goed, die spul straatboewe,” sê hy toe 'n motorfiets hulle verbysteek.

“Ek het van 'n motorfiets gedroom,” sê Harry, wat skielik onthou. “Dit het gevlieg.”

Oom Vernon jaag amper in die kar voor hom vas. Hy swaai om in sy sitplek en gil op Harry. Sy gesig lyk soos 'n tamaai rooi beet met 'n snor. “MOTORFIETSE Vlieg NIE!”

Dudley en Piers giggel.

“Ek weet,” sê Harry. “Dit was 'n droom.”

Hy wens hy het liever niks gesê nie. As daar iets is wat die Dursleys meer haat as sy vrae, dan is dit wanneer hy oor goed praat wat dinge doen wat hulle nie regtig kan doen nie. Dit maak nie saak of dit in 'n droom of 'n strokiesprent was nie – dis of hulle bang is dat hy gevaarlike idees gaan kry.

Dis 'n heerlike sonnige Saterdag en die dieretuin is vol mense. By die ingang koop die Dursleys vir Dudley en Piers elk 'n yslike sjokoladeroomys en toe, omdat die vriendelike vrou vir Harry vra wat hy wil hê voor hulle hom kon wegkry, koop hulle vir hom 'n goedkoop suurlemoen-ysstokkie. Dis glad nie sleg nie, dink Harry terwyl hy loop en lek en na die gorilla kyk. Die gorilla krap sy kop. Hy lyk verbasend baie na Dudley, hy's net nie blond nie.

Dis die lekkerste oggend wat Harry in 'n lang tyd gehad het. Hy loop

'n cnt agter die Dursleys sodat Dudley en Piers, wat hier teen etenstyd al opgeskeep is met hulself, nie op hul gunstelingstokperdjie – slaan Harry – kan terugval nie. Vir middagete gaan hulle na die dieretuin se restaurant en toe Dudley 'n woedeaanval kry omdat sy roomys-en-vrugte-nagereg nie groot genoeg is nie, bestel oom Vernon vir hom nog een en mag Harry die eerste een klaar eet.

Harry het later besef alles was te goed om waar te wees.

Na middagete gaan hulle na die reptielhuis. Dis koel en donker daarbinne, met verligte vensters al langs die mure. Agter die glas kruip en seil allerhande soorte akkedisse en slange oor stukke hout en klip. Dudley en Piers wil die groot, giftige kobras sien en die dik luislange wat 'n mens kan papdruk. Sommer gou sien Dudley die grootste slang in die plek. Die ding sal twee keer om oom Vernon se kar kan draai en dit druk tot dit soos 'n vullisblik lyk – maar op hierdie oomblik is die slang nie van plan om te roer nie. Dit is vas aan die slaap.

Dudley druk sy neus styf teen die glas en staar na die glinsterende bruin kronkels.

“Sê hy moet iets doen,” kla hy teenoor sy pa. Oom Vernon tik teen die glas, maar die slang kik of mik nie.

“Doen dit weer,” gebied Dudley. Oom Vernon trommel teen die glas met sy kneukels, maar die slang is in droomland.

“Dis so vervelig,” kerm Dudley. Sleepvoet stap hy weg.

Harry loop tot voor die tenk en staar stip na die slang. Dit sal hom nie verbaas as die slang dood is van verveling nie – geen geselskap nie, net dom mense wat teen die glas slaan en hom die hele dag lank pla. Dis erger as om 'n kas vir 'n kamer te hê, waar jou enigste besoeker tant Petunia is wat teen die deur hamer om jou wakker te maak – hy mag ten minste in die res van die huis kom.

Toe, skielik, gaan die slang se kraalogies oop. Stadig, baie stadig lig hy sy kop tot sy oë regoor Harry s'n is.

Hy knipoog.

Harry staar. Toe kyk hy vinnig rond om te sien of iemand hom dophou. Niemand kyk nie. Hy draai terug na die slang en knipoog ook.

Die slang ruk sy kop in Dudley en oom Vernon se rigting en rol sy oë na die dak. Hy gooi 'n blik in Harry se rigting wat heeltemal duidelik sê: “Dis hoe dit altyd is.”

“Ek weet,” mompel Harry deur die glas, hoewel hy glad nie seker is of die slang hom kan hoor nie. “Dit moet irriterend wees.”

Die slang knik woes.

“Waar kom jy vandaan?” vra Harry.

Die punt van die slang se stert wys na 'n klein bordjie reg langs die glas. Harry loer daarna.

Boakonstriktor, Brasilië.

“Was dit lekker daar?”

Die boakonstriktor se stert wys weer na die teken en Harry bes verder: *Hierdie slang is in gevangenskap geteel.* “O, ek sien – jy was dus nog nooit in Brasilië nie?”

Die slang skud sy kop net toe ’n oorverdwende kreet agter Harry opklink, sodat sowel hy as die slang wip van die skrik. “DUDLEY! OOM VERNON! KOM KYK NA HIERDIE SLANG! JULLE SAL NIE GLO WAT DIT DOEN NIE!”

Dudley waggel nader so vinnig as wat hy kan.

“Gee pad, jy,” sê hy en stamp Harry in die ribbes. Harry is onverhoeds gevang en val hard op die sementvloer. Toe gebeur iets, so vinnig, dat niemand kon sien presies wat dit was nie – die een oomblik leen Dudley en Piers teen die glas, die volgende spring hulle terug met uitroepe van skrik en afgryse.

Harry kom orent en snak na asem; die glas voor die boakonstriktor se tenk het verdwyn. Die groot slang is besig om kronkelend oor die vloer te seil. Die mense in die reptielhuis gil en skree en hardloop na die uitgange.

Toe die slang vinnig verby hom seil, kan Harry sweer hy hoor ’n lae, asemrige stem sê, “Bras-s-silië, hier kom ek . . . dankie, amigo”

Die opsigter van die reptielhuis is in ’n geskokte toestand.

“Maar die glas,” hou hy aan sê, “wat het van die glas geword?”

Die bestuurder van die dieretuin maak self vir tant Petunia ’n koppie sterk soet tee terwyl hy oor en oor verskoning vra. Piers en Dudley kan net onsamehangend brabbel. Sover Harry kon sien, het die slang niks anders gedoen as om in die verbyseil speels na hul hakke te hap nie, maar toe hulle veilig in oom Vernon se kar sit, sweer Dudley hoog en laag dat sy been amper afgebyt is, terwyl Piers met kleur en geur vertel hoe die slang hom wou dooddruk. Die ergste kom, ten minste vir Harry, toe Piers genoeg bedaar het om te kan sê, “Harry het met die slang gepraat, nè, Harry.”

Oom Vernon wag tot Piers behoorlik uit die huis is voor hy vir Harry takel. Hy is so briesend, hy kan skaars praat. Hy wurg die woorde uit: “Gaan – kas – bly daar – niks kos,” toe sak hy inmekaar op ’n stoel en tant Petunia moet draf en ’n groot glas brandewyn gaan haal.

Baie later lê Harry in sy kas en wens hy het ’n horlosie. Hy weet glad nie hoe laat dit is nie en ook nie of die Dursleys nog wakker is nie. Hy kan dit nie waag om kombuis toe te sluip vir ’n stukkie kos voor hulle nie vas slaap nie.

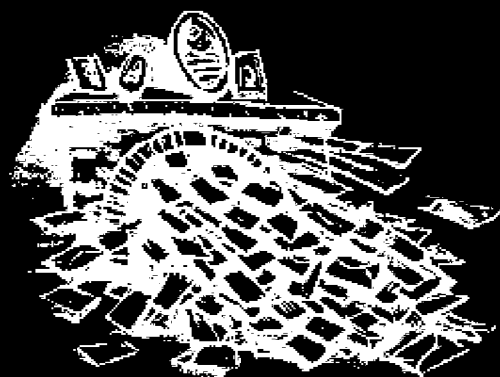
Hy bly al amper tien jaar by die Dursleys, tien mislike jare, vir so lank as wat hy kan onthou, van hy baie klein was en sy ouers in ’n motorongeluk dood is. Hy kan niks van die ongeluk onthou nie. Soms, as hy lank

in die kas moet bly en tyd het om te dink, beleef hy hierdie vreemde visioen: 'n verblindende groen lig en 'n brandpyn op sy voorkop. Dit, so dink hy, moet die ongeluk wees, hoewel hy die groen lig nie kan verklaar nie. Sy ouers kan hy glad nie onthou nie. Sy oom en tante praat nooit oor hulle nie en hy mag natuurlik nie vrae vra nie. Daar's ook geen foto's van hulle in die huis nie.

Toe hy jonger was, het Harry gedroom van 'n onbekende familielid wat hom kom haal en hom wegneem, maar die droom het nooit waar geword nie; die Dursleys is sy enigste familie. Tog, soms voel dit vir hom (dalk is dit wensdenkery) dat daar vreemdelinge op straat is wat hom ken. Baie eienaardige vreemdelinge. 'n Klein mannetjie met 'n pers keil het eenkeer vir hom gebuig toe hy en tant Petunia en Dudley inkopies gaan doen het. Tant Petunia was woedend. Sy wou weet of hy die man ken en toe het sy hulle uit die winkel geboender sonder dat hulle enigiets gekoop het. 'n Ander keer het 'n ou vrou met woeste hare en groen klere vrolik uit 'n bus vir hom gewaai. 'n Bleskopman in 'n lang pers mantel het sy hand in die straat kom skud, en toe weggeloop sonder om 'n woord te sê. Die vreemdste aan hierdie mense is die manier waarop hulle net eenvoudig wegraak die oomblik dat Harry hulle van naderby wil bekyk.

By die skool het Harry geen vriende nie. Almal weet Dudley en sy maats haat daardie simpele ou Harry Potter in sy sakkerige klere en gebreekte bril en niemand sal dit waag om met Dudley se bende skoor te soek nie.

CHAPTER THREE



THE LETTERS FROM NO ONE

The escape of the Brazilian boa constrictor earned Harry his longest-ever punishment. By the time he was allowed out of his cupboard again, the summer holidays had started and Dudley had already broken his new video camera, crashed his remote control airplane, and, first time out on his racing bike, knocked down old Mrs. Figg as she crossed Privet Drive on her crutches.

Harry was glad school was over, but there was no escaping Dudley's gang, who visited the house every single day. Piers, Dennis, Malcolm, and Gordon were all big and stupid, but as Dudley was the biggest and stupidest of the lot, he was the leader. The rest of them were all quite happy to join in Dudley's favorite sport: Harry Hunting.

This was why Harry spent as much time as possible out of the house, wandering around and thinking about the end of the holidays, where he could see a tiny ray of hope. When September came he would be going off to secondary school and, for the first time in his life, he wouldn't be with Dudley. Dudley had been accepted at Uncle Vernon's old private school, Smeltings. Piers Polkiss was going there too. Harry, on the other hand, was going to Stonewall High, the local public school. Dudley thought this was very funny.

"They stuff people's heads down the toilet the first day at Stonewall," he told Harry. "Want to come upstairs and practice?"

"No, thanks," said Harry. "The poor toilet's never had anything as horrible as your head down it — it might be sick." Then he ran,

before Dudley could work out what he'd said.

One day in July, Aunt Petunia took Dudley to London to buy his Smeltings uniform, leaving Harry at Mrs. Figg's. Mrs. Figg wasn't as bad as usual. It turned out she'd broken her leg tripping over one of her cats, and she didn't seem quite as fond of them as before. She let Harry watch television and gave him a bit of chocolate cake that tasted as though she'd had it for several years.

That evening, Dudley paraded around the living room for the family in his brand-new uniform. Smeltings boys wore maroon tailcoats, orange knickerbockers, and flat straw hats called boaters. They also carried knobbly sticks, used for hitting each other while the teachers weren't looking. This was supposed to be good training for later life.

As he looked at Dudley in his new knickerbockers, Uncle Vernon said gruffly that it was the proudest moment of his life. Aunt Petunia burst into tears and said she couldn't believe it was her Ickle Dudleykins, he looked so handsome and grown-up. Harry didn't trust himself to speak. He thought two of his ribs might already have cracked from trying not to laugh.

There was a horrible smell in the kitchen the next morning when Harry went in for breakfast. It seemed to be coming from a large metal tub in the sink. He went to have a look. The tub was full of what looked like dirty rags swimming in gray water.

"What's this?" he asked Aunt Petunia. Her lips tightened as they always did if he dared to ask a question.

"Your new school uniform," she said.

Harry looked in the bowl again.

“Oh,” he said, “I didn’t realize it had to be so wet.”

“Don’t be stupid,” snapped Aunt Petunia. “I’m dyeing some of Dudley’s old things gray for you. It’ll look just like everyone else’s when I’ve finished.”

Harry seriously doubted this, but thought it best not to argue. He sat down at the table and tried not to think about how he was going to look on his first day at Stonewall High — like he was wearing bits of old elephant skin, probably.

Dudley and Uncle Vernon came in, both with wrinkled noses because of the smell from Harry’s new uniform. Uncle Vernon opened his newspaper as usual and Dudley banged his Smelting stick, which he carried everywhere, on the table.

They heard the click of the mail slot and flop of letters on the doormat.

“Get the mail, Dudley,” said Uncle Vernon from behind his paper.

“Make Harry get it.”

“Get the mail, Harry.”

“Make Dudley get it.”

“Poke him with your Smelting stick, Dudley.”

Harry dodged the Smelting stick and went to get the mail. Three things lay on the doormat: a postcard from Uncle Vernon’s sister Marge, who was vacationing on the Isle of Wight, a brown envelope that looked like a bill, and — *a letter for Harry*.

Harry picked it up and stared at it, his heart twanging like a giant elastic band. No one, ever, in his whole life, had written to him. Who would? He had no friends, no other relatives — he didn’t belong to the library, so he’d never even got rude notes asking for books back.

Yet here it was, a letter, addressed so plainly there could be no mistake:

Mr. H. Potter
The Cupboard under the Stairs
4 Privet Drive
Little Whinging
Surrey

The envelope was thick and heavy, made of yellowish parchment, and the address was written in emerald-green ink. There was no stamp.

Turning the envelope over, his hand trembling, Harry saw a purple wax seal bearing a coat of arms; a lion, an eagle, a badger, and a snake surrounding a large letter *H*.

“Hurry up, boy!” shouted Uncle Vernon from the kitchen. “What are you doing, checking for letter bombs?” He chuckled at his own joke.

Harry went back to the kitchen, still staring at his letter. He handed Uncle Vernon the bill and the postcard, sat down, and slowly began to open the yellow envelope.

Uncle Vernon ripped open the bill, snorted in disgust, and flipped over the postcard.

“Marge’s ill,” he informed Aunt Petunia. “Ate a funny whelk . . .”

“Dad!” said Dudley suddenly. “Dad, Harry’s got something!”

Harry was on the point of unfolding his letter, which was written on the same heavy parchment as the envelope, when it was jerked sharply out of his hand by Uncle Vernon.

“That’s *mine*!” said Harry, trying to snatch it back.

“Who’d be writing to you?” sneered Uncle Vernon, shaking the letter open with one hand and glancing at it. His face went from red to green faster than a set of traffic lights. And it didn’t stop there. Within seconds it was the grayish white of old porridge.

“P-P-Petunia!” he gasped.

Dudley tried to grab the letter to read it, but Uncle Vernon held it high out of his reach. Aunt Petunia took it curiously and read the first line. For a moment it looked as though she might faint. She clutched her throat and made a choking noise.

“Vernon! Oh my goodness — Vernon!”

They stared at each other, seeming to have forgotten that Harry and Dudley were still in the room. Dudley wasn’t used to being ignored. He gave his father a sharp tap on the head with his Smelting stick.

“I want to read that letter,” he said loudly.

“I want to read it,” said Harry furiously, “as it’s *mine*.”

“Get out, both of you,” croaked Uncle Vernon, stuffing the letter back inside its envelope.

Harry didn’t move.

“I WANT MY LETTER!” he shouted.

“Let *me* see it!” demanded Dudley.

“OUT!” roared Uncle Vernon, and he took both Harry and Dudley by the scruffs of their necks and threw them into the hall, slamming the kitchen door behind them. Harry and Dudley promptly had a furious but silent fight over who would listen at the keyhole; Dudley won, so Harry, his glasses dangling from one ear, lay flat on his stomach to listen at the crack between door and floor.

“Vernon,” Aunt Petunia was saying in a quivering voice, “look at the address — how could they possibly know where he sleeps? You don’t think they’re watching the house?”

“Watching — spying — might be following us,” muttered Uncle Vernon wildly.

“But what should we do, Vernon? Should we write back? Tell them we don’t want —”

Harry could see Uncle Vernon’s shiny black shoes pacing up and down the kitchen.

“No,” he said finally. “No, we’ll ignore it. If they don’t get an answer. . . . Yes, that’s best . . . we won’t do anything. . . .”

“But —”

“I’m not having one in the house, Petunia! Didn’t we swear when we took him in we’d stamp out that dangerous nonsense?”

That evening when he got back from work, Uncle Vernon did something he’d never done before; he visited Harry in his cupboard.

“Where’s my letter?” said Harry, the moment Uncle Vernon had squeezed through the door. “Who’s writing to me?”

“No one. It was addressed to you by mistake,” said Uncle Vernon shortly. “I have burned it.”

“It was *not* a mistake,” said Harry angrily, “it had my cupboard on it.”

“SILENCE!” yelled Uncle Vernon, and a couple of spiders fell from the ceiling. He took a few deep breaths and then forced his face into a smile, which looked quite painful.

“Er — yes, Harry — about this cupboard. Your aunt and I have been thinking . . . you’re really getting a bit big for it . . . we think it

might be nice if you moved into Dudley's second bedroom."

"Why?" said Harry.

"Don't ask questions!" snapped his uncle. "Take this stuff upstairs, now."

The Dursleys' house had four bedrooms: one for Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia, one for visitors (usually Uncle Vernon's sister, Marge), one where Dudley slept, and one where Dudley kept all the toys and things that wouldn't fit into his first bedroom. It only took Harry one trip upstairs to move everything he owned from the cupboard to this room. He sat down on the bed and stared around him. Nearly everything in here was broken. The month-old video camera was lying on top of a small, working tank Dudley had once driven over the next door neighbor's dog; in the corner was Dudley's first-ever television set, which he'd put his foot through when his favorite program had been canceled; there was a large birdcage, which had once held a parrot that Dudley had swapped at school for a real air rifle, which was up on a shelf with the end all bent because Dudley had sat on it. Other shelves were full of books. They were the only things in the room that looked as though they'd never been touched.

From downstairs came the sound of Dudley bawling at his mother, "I don't *want* him in there . . . I *need* that room . . . make him get out. . . ."

Harry sighed and stretched out on the bed. Yesterday he'd have given anything to be up here. Today he'd rather be back in his cupboard with that letter than up here without it.

Next morning at breakfast, everyone was rather quiet. Dudley was in shock. He'd screamed, whacked his father with his Smelting stick,

been sick on purpose, kicked his mother, and thrown his tortoise through the greenhouse roof, and he still didn't have his room back. Harry was thinking about this time yesterday and bitterly wishing he'd opened the letter in the hall. Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia kept looking at each other darkly.

When the mail arrived, Uncle Vernon, who seemed to be trying to be nice to Harry, made Dudley go and get it. They heard him banging things with his Smelting stick all the way down the hall. Then he shouted, "There's another one! 'Mr. H. Potter, The Smallest Bedroom, 4 Privet Drive —'"

With a strangled cry, Uncle Vernon leapt from his seat and ran down the hall, Harry right behind him. Uncle Vernon had to wrestle Dudley to the ground to get the letter from him, which was made difficult by the fact that Harry had grabbed Uncle Vernon around the neck from behind. After a minute of confused fighting, in which everyone got hit a lot by the Smelting stick, Uncle Vernon straightened up, gasping for breath, with Harry's letter clutched in his hand.

"Go to your cupboard — I mean, your bedroom," he wheezed at Harry. "Dudley — go — just go."

Harry walked round and round his new room. Someone knew he had moved out of his cupboard and they seemed to know he hadn't received his first letter. Surely that meant they'd try again? And this time he'd make sure they didn't fail. He had a plan.

The repaired alarm clock rang at six o'clock the next morning. Harry turned it off quickly and dressed silently. He mustn't wake the Dursleys. He stole downstairs without turning on any of the lights.

He was going to wait for the postman on the corner of Privet Drive and get the letters for number four first. His heart hammered as he crept across the dark hall toward the front door —

“AAAAARRRGH!”

Harry leapt into the air; he’d trodden on something big and squashy on the doormat — something *alive*!

Lights clicked on upstairs and to his horror Harry realized that the big, squashy something had been his uncle’s face. Uncle Vernon had been lying at the foot of the front door in a sleeping bag, clearly making sure that Harry didn’t do exactly what he’d been trying to do. He shouted at Harry for about half an hour and then told him to go and make a cup of tea. Harry shuffled miserably off into the kitchen and by the time he got back, the mail had arrived, right into Uncle Vernon’s lap. Harry could see three letters addressed in green ink.

“I want —” he began, but Uncle Vernon was tearing the letters into pieces before his eyes.

Uncle Vernon didn’t go to work that day. He stayed at home and nailed up the mail slot.

“See,” he explained to Aunt Petunia through a mouthful of nails, “if they can’t *deliver* them they’ll just give up.”

“I’m not sure that’ll work, Vernon.”

“Oh, these people’s minds work in strange ways, Petunia, they’re not like you and me,” said Uncle Vernon, trying to knock in a nail with the piece of fruitcake Aunt Petunia had just brought him.

On Friday, no less than twelve letters arrived for Harry. As they couldn’t go through the mail slot they had been pushed under the door, slotted through the sides, and a few even forced through the

small window in the downstairs bathroom.

Uncle Vernon stayed at home again. After burning all the letters, he got out a hammer and nails and boarded up the cracks around the front and back doors so no one could go out. He hummed “Tiptoe Through the Tulips” as he worked, and jumped at small noises.

On Saturday, things began to get out of hand. Twenty-four letters to Harry found their way into the house, rolled up and hidden inside each of the two dozen eggs that their very confused milkman had handed Aunt Petunia through the living room window. While Uncle Vernon made furious telephone calls to the post office and the dairy trying to find someone to complain to, Aunt Petunia shredded the letters in her food processor.

“Who on earth wants to talk to *you* this badly?” Dudley asked Harry in amazement.

On Sunday morning, Uncle Vernon sat down at the breakfast table looking tired and rather ill, but happy.

“No post on Sundays,” he reminded them cheerfully as he spread marmalade on his newspapers, “no damn letters today —”

Something came whizzing down the kitchen chimney as he spoke and caught him sharply on the back of the head. Next moment, thirty or forty letters came pelting out of the fireplace like bullets. The Dursleys ducked, but Harry leapt into the air trying to catch one —

“Out! OUT!”

Uncle Vernon seized Harry around the waist and threw him into the hall. When Aunt Petunia and Dudley had run out with their arms over their faces, Uncle Vernon slammed the door shut. They could hear the

letters still streaming into the room, bouncing off the walls and floor.

“That does it,” said Uncle Vernon, trying to speak calmly but pulling great tufts out of his mustache at the same time. “I want you all back here in five minutes ready to leave. We’re going away. Just pack some clothes. No arguments!”

He looked so dangerous with half his mustache missing that no one dared argue. Ten minutes later they had wrenched their way through the boarded-up doors and were in the car, speeding toward the highway. Dudley was sniffing in the back seat; his father had hit him round the head for holding them up while he tried to pack his television, VCR, and computer in his sports bag.

They drove. And they drove. Even Aunt Petunia didn’t dare ask where they were going. Every now and then Uncle Vernon would take a sharp turn and drive in the opposite direction for a while.

“Shake ’em off . . . shake ’em off,” he would mutter whenever he did this.

They didn’t stop to eat or drink all day. By nightfall Dudley was howling. He’d never had such a bad day in his life. He was hungry, he’d missed five television programs he’d wanted to see, and he’d never gone so long without blowing up an alien on his computer.

Uncle Vernon stopped at last outside a gloomy-looking hotel on the outskirts of a big city. Dudley and Harry shared a room with twin beds and damp, musty sheets. Dudley snored but Harry stayed awake, sitting on the windowsill, staring down at the lights of passing cars and wondering. . . .

They ate stale cornflakes and cold tinned tomatoes on toast for breakfast the next day. They had just finished when the owner of the

hotel came over to their table.

“’Scuse me, but is one of you Mr. H. Potter? Only I got about an ’undred of these at the front desk.”

She held up a letter so they could read the green ink address:

Mr. H. Potter

Room 17

Railview Hotel

Cokeworth

Harry made a grab for the letter but Uncle Vernon knocked his hand out of the way. The woman stared.

“I’ll take them,” said Uncle Vernon, standing up quickly and following her from the dining room.

“Wouldn’t it be better just to go home, dear?” Aunt Petunia suggested timidly, hours later, but Uncle Vernon didn’t seem to hear her. Exactly what he was looking for, none of them knew. He drove them into the middle of a forest, got out, looked around, shook his head, got back in the car, and off they went again. The same thing happened in the middle of a plowed field, halfway across a suspension bridge, and at the top of a multilevel parking garage.

“Daddy’s gone mad, hasn’t he?” Dudley asked Aunt Petunia dully late that afternoon. Uncle Vernon had parked at the coast, locked them all inside the car, and disappeared.

It started to rain. Great drops beat on the roof of the car. Dudley sniveled.

“It’s Monday,” he told his mother. “The Great Humberto’s on

tonight. I want to stay somewhere with a *television*.”

Monday. This reminded Harry of something. If it *was* Monday — and you could usually count on Dudley to know the days of the week, because of television — then tomorrow, Tuesday, was Harry’s eleventh birthday. Of course, his birthdays were never exactly fun — last year, the Dursleys had given him a coat hanger and a pair of Uncle Vernon’s old socks. Still, you weren’t eleven every day.

Uncle Vernon was back and he was smiling. He was also carrying a long, thin package and didn’t answer Aunt Petunia when she asked what he’d bought.

“Found the perfect place!” he said. “Come on! Everyone out!”

It was very cold outside the car. Uncle Vernon was pointing at what looked like a large rock way out at sea. Perched on top of the rock was the most miserable little shack you could imagine. One thing was certain, there was no television in there.

“Storm forecast for tonight!” said Uncle Vernon gleefully, clapping his hands together. “And this gentleman’s kindly agreed to lend us his boat!”

A toothless old man came ambling up to them, pointing, with a rather wicked grin, at an old rowboat bobbing in the iron-gray water below them.

“I’ve already got us some rations,” said Uncle Vernon, “so all aboard!”

It was freezing in the boat. Icy sea spray and rain crept down their necks and a chilly wind whipped their faces. After what seemed like hours they reached the rock, where Uncle Vernon, slipping and sliding, led the way to the broken-down house.

The inside was horrible; it smelled strongly of seaweed, the wind whistled through the gaps in the wooden walls, and the fireplace was damp and empty. There were only two rooms.

Uncle Vernon's rations turned out to be a bag of chips each and four bananas. He tried to start a fire but the empty chip bags just smoked and shriveled up.

"Could do with some of those letters now, eh?" he said cheerfully.

He was in a very good mood. Obviously he thought nobody stood a chance of reaching them here in a storm to deliver mail. Harry privately agreed, though the thought didn't cheer him up at all.

As night fell, the promised storm blew up around them. Spray from the high waves splattered the walls of the hut and a fierce wind rattled the filthy windows. Aunt Petunia found a few moldy blankets in the second room and made up a bed for Dudley on the moth-eaten sofa. She and Uncle Vernon went off to the lumpy bed next door, and Harry was left to find the softest bit of floor he could and to curl up under the thinnest, most ragged blanket.

The storm raged more and more ferociously as the night went on. Harry couldn't sleep. He shivered and turned over, trying to get comfortable, his stomach rumbling with hunger. Dudley's snores were drowned by the low rolls of thunder that started near midnight. The lighted dial of Dudley's watch, which was dangling over the edge of the sofa on his fat wrist, told Harry he'd be eleven in ten minutes' time. He lay and watched his birthday tick nearer, wondering if the Dursleys would remember at all, wondering where the letter writer was now.

Five minutes to go. Harry heard something creak outside. He

hoped the roof wasn't going to fall in, although he might be warmer if it did. Four minutes to go. Maybe the house in Privet Drive would be so full of letters when they got back that he'd be able to steal one somehow.

Three minutes to go. Was that the sea, slapping hard on the rock like that? And (two minutes to go) what was that funny crunching noise? Was the rock crumbling into the sea?

One minute to go and he'd be eleven. Thirty seconds . . . twenty . . . ten . . . nine — maybe he'd wake Dudley up, just to annoy him — three . . . two . . . one . . .

BOOM.

The whole shack shivered and Harry sat bolt upright, staring at the door. Someone was outside, knocking to come in.

Die Briewe van Niemand

Die ontsnapping van die Brasiliaanse boakonstriktor laat Harry die langste straf van sy lewe kry. Toe hy uiteindelik uit die kas mag kom, het die somervakansie begin en Dudley het al sy nuwe videokamera gebreek, die afstandbeheerde vliegtuigie verongeluk en, die eerste keer dat hy op die resiesfiets klim, vir tant Freya omgery toe sy op krukke oor Ligusterlaan sukkel.

Harry is bly dat die skool uit is, maar daar is nou bitter min wegkomkans van Dudley en sy bende. Hulle is feitlik elke dag by die huis. Piers, Dennis, Malcolm en Gerrit is almal yslik groot en dom, maar omdat Dudley die grootste en domste is, is hy die leier. Vir die res is dit genoeg pret om Dudley se gunstelingspeletjie te speel: Jag Harry.

Dis die rede hoekom Harry so dikwels moontlik ver buite die huis is. Hy dwaal rond en droom oor die einde van die vakansie waar daar 'n flikkering van hoop op hom wag. Na die vakansie gaan hy hoërskool toe en vir die eerste keer in sy lewe gaan hy nie saam met Dudley wees nie. Dudley gaan na Smeltings, oom Vernon se ou skool. Piers Polkiss gaan ook soontoe. Harry gaan na Stonewall Hoër, die plaaslike staatskool. Dudley dink dis alles baie snaaks.

“Hulle druk 'n mens se kop in die toilet as jy nuut is by Stonewall,” sê hy met smaak aan Harry. “Kom boontoe dan oefen ons . . .”

“Nee dankie,” sê Harry. “Die arme toilet het nog nie iets so viesliks soos jou kop in hom gehad nie – netnou gooi hy op.” Toe laat hy vat, voor Dudley kan uitwerk wat hy nou eintlik gesê het.

In die middel van die vakansie neem tant Petunia vir Dudley stad toe om sy Smeltings-uniform te gaan koop. Harry moet by tant Freya bly. Tant Freya is nie so erg soos gewoonlik nie. Sy het haar been gebreek toe sy oor een van haar katte gestruikel het en sy's glad nie meer so dol op hulle nie. Sy laat Harry televisie kyk en gee hom 'n stuk sjokoladekoek wat smaak asof sy dit al jare lank het.

Daardie aand paradeer Dudley op en af in die sitkamer in sy splinter-nuwe uniform. Die seuns by Smeltings dra wynrooi swaelsterthaadjies, oranje sakbroeke en plat strooihoede met 'n lintjie om. Elkeen het ook 'n

knoesterige stok waarmee hulle mekaar slaan as die onderwysers nie kyk nie. Dit bou glo karakter.

Toe hy so na Dudley in sy nuwe sakbroek kyk, sê oom Vernon met 'n stem wat in sy keel stok dat dit die trotsste oomblik van sy lewe is. Tant Petunia bars in trane uit en sê sy kan nie glo dit is haar liefste klein Dudleytjie nie, hy lyk so aantreklik en volwasse. Harry waag dit nie om 'n woord te sê nie. Hy is seker hy het al ten minste twee van sy ribbes gekraak van sukkel om nie te lag nie.

Die volgende oggend toe Harry kombuis toe gaan vir ontbyt, hang daar 'n mislike reuk in die huis. Dit kom uit 'n enorme metaalskottel in die wasbak. Harry stap nader en kyk. Die skottel is vol goed wat soos ou vuil lappe lyk en in grys water dryf.

"Wat is dit?" vra hy vir tant Petunia. Haar lippe word styf soos altyd wanneer hy 'n vraag vra.

"Jou nuwe skooluniform," sê sy.

Harry kyk weer.

"O," sê hy. "Ek het nie geweet dit moet so nat wees nie."

"Moet tog nie so onnosel wees nie," snou tant Petunia hom toe. "Ek kleur 'n paar van Dudley se ou goed vir jou grys. Dit sal nes al die ander kinders s'n lyk as ek daarmee klaar is."

Harry is nie so seker hiervan nie, maar hy waag dit nie om te stry nie. Hy gaan sit by die tafel en probeer hard om nie te dink hoe hy gaan lyk op sy eerste dag by Stonewall Hoër nie – seker soos iets wat ou stukke olifantvel dra.

Dudley en oom Vernon kom in, albei met opgetrekte neuse van Harry se uniform wat so stink. Oom Vernon maak soos altyd die koerant oop en Dudley slaan op die tafel met sy Smeltings-stok wat hy oral met hom saamdra.

Hulle hoor die briewegleuf klap en die geluid van koeverte wat op die mat val.

"Gaan haal die pos, Dudley," sê oom Vernon van agter die koerant.

"Laat Harry dit doen."

"Gaan haal die pos, Harry."

"Laat Dudley dit doen."

"Maar slaan hom met jou Smeltings-stok, Dudley."

Harry ontwyk die stok en gaan haal die pos. Daar lê drie items op die deurmatjie: 'n poskaart van oom Vernon se suster, Marge, wat vakansie hou op die Isle of Wight, 'n bruin koevert wat soos 'n rekening lyk en – 'n brief vir Harry.

Harry tel dit op en staar daarna, sy hart klop soos 'n reusestaanhorlosie. In sy hele lewe het niemand nog ooit vir hom geskryf nie. Wie sal tog? Hy het geen vriende nie, geen ander familie nie – hy behoort ook nie aan die biblioteek nie, so hy kry nooit eens kwaai briewe van hulle af nie.

log, hier is dit, 'n brief, so duidelik geadresseer, daar kan geen twyfel wees nie:

*Mnr. H. Potter
Die Kas onder die Trappe
Ligusterlaan 4
Little Whinging
Surrey*

Die koevert is dik en swaar, dis gemaak van geel perkament en die adres is in grasgroen ink geskryf. Daar is nie 'n seël op nie.

Met bewende hande draai Harry die koevert om. Agterop is 'n stempel in pers lak gedruk. Dis 'n wapenskild met 'n leeu, 'n arend, 'n ratel en 'n slang wat om die letter "H" gedrapeer is.

"Opskud, opskud!" skree oom Vernon uit die kombuis. "Wat maak jy tog? Kyk jy vir 'n briefbom?" Hy lag vir sy eie grap.

Harry stap terug kombuis toe. Hy staar nog steeds na sy brief. Hy gee die rekening en die poskaart vir oom Vernon, gaan sit en maak die geel koevert stadig oop.

Oom Vernon ruk die rekening oop, snork ergerlik en draai die poskaart om.

"Marge is siek," lig hy tant Petunia in. "Skulpvis geëet wat af is . . ."

"Pa!" sê Dudley skielik. "Pa, Harry het iets!"

Harry is op die punt om sy brief oop te vou. Dis van dieselfde swaar perkament as die koevert, maar oom Vernon pluk dit uit sy hand.

"Dis myne!" sê Harry en probeer dit teruggryp.

"Wie sal tog aan jou skryf?" sê oom Vernon honend. Met een hand skud hy die brief oop en loer daarna. Sy gesig verander van rooi na groen, vinniger as wat selfs 'n verkeerslig dit kan doen. Dit hou nie daar op nie. Binne 'n oogwenk is sy wange 'n vaalgrys kleur, baie soos ou hawermoutpap.

"P-P-Petunia!" stamel hy.

Dudley probeer die brief gryp om dit ook te lees, maar oom Vernon hou dit buite sy bereik. Openlik verbaas neem tant Petunia dit en lees die eerste reël. Vir 'n oomblik lyk dit of sy gaan flou word. Sy gryp na haar keel en maak wurggeluide.

"Vernon! O, my goeiste – Vernon!"

Hulle staar na mekaar, asof hulle heeltemal vergeet het dat Harry en Dudley ook in die kamer is. Dudley is nie daaraan gewoond dat mense hom ignoreer nie. Hy tik sy pa op die kop met sy Smeltings-stok.

"Ek wil daardie brief lees," sê hy hard.

"Ek wil dit lees," sê Harry vererg, "dis myne."

"Uit, albei van julle," krys oom Vernon uiteindelik en prop die brief terug in die koevert.

Harry roer nie.

“EK WIL MY BRIEF HÊ!” gil hy.

“Laat my dit sien!” beveel Dudley.

“UIT!” brul oom Vernon en pak vir sowel Harry as Dudley agter hulle nekke, slinger hulle uit in die gang en slaan die kombuisdeur agter hulle toe. Harry en Dudley begin onmiddellik met ’n stille maar woeste geveg oor wie by die sleutelgat gaan affluister; Dudley wen en Harry gaan lê plat op sy maag om by die gleuf tussen die deur en die vloer te kan luister. Sy bril hang aan een oor.

“Vernon,” sê tant Petunia in ’n bewerige stemmetjie, “kyk na die adres – hoe op aarde weet hulle waar hy slaap? Dink jy hulle hou die huis dop?”

“Dophou – spioeneer – agtervolg,” mompel oom Vernon wildweg.

“Wat gaan ons doen, Vernon? Gaan ons terugskryf? Vir hulle sê ons wil niks –”

Harry kan sien hoe oom Vernon se blinkswart skoene op en af stap.

“Nee,” sê hy uiteindelik. “Nee, ons ignoreer dit. As hulle nie ’n antwoord kry nie . . . ja, dis die beste . . . ons doen niks . . .”

“Maar –”

“Ek weier om so een in die huis te hê, Petunia! Het ons nie gesweer toe ons hom geneem het dat ons hierdie gevaarlike onsin met wortel en tak gaan uitroei nie?”

Daardie aand toe hy van die werk af kom, doen oom Vernon iets wat hy nog nooit tevore gedoen het nie; hy besoek Harry in sy kas.

“Waar’s my brief?” vra Harry die oomblik toe oom Vernon homself by die kas ingewurm het. “Wie het vir my geskryf?”

“Niemand nie. Dis per ongeluk aan jou gestuur,” sê oom Vernon kortaf. “Ek het dit verbrand.”

“Dit was *nie* ’n ongeluk nie,” sê Harry kwaai. “Daar het ‘die kas’ op gestaan.”

“BLY STIL!” skree oom Vernon en ’n paar spinnekoppe val uit die dak. Hy haal ’n paar keer diep asem en dwing sy gesig in ’n glimlag, ’n gepynigde glimlag.

“H’m – ja, Harry – die kas. Ek en jou tante het gedink . . . jy’s regtig nou te groot vir die kas . . . ons reken dis dalk ’n goeie idee as jy eerder in Dudley se tweede kamer slaap.”

“Hoekom?” vra Harry.

“Moenie vrae vra nie!” snou sy oom hom toe. “Vat jou goed boontoe, nou, dadelik.”

Die Dursleys se huis het vier slaapkamers: een vir oom Vernon en tant Petunia, een vir besoekers (gewoonlik oom Vernon se suster, Marge), een waar Dudley slaap en een waar Dudley al die goed hou waarvoor daar nie

in sy eerste slaapkamer plek is nie. Harry hoef net een keer te loop om al sy besittings na hierdie kamer te dra. Hy gaan sit op die bed en kyk om hom rond.

Amper alles is stukkend. Die maand oue videokamera lê bo-op die speelgoedtenk waarmee Dudley op 'n keer oor die bure se hond gery het; in die hoek is Dudley se heel eerste televisiestel, die een waarin hy 'n gat geskop het toe sy gunstelingprogram van die lug af is; daar is 'n groot voelhok waarin 'n papegaai was wat Dudley by die skool geruil het vir 'n windbuks, wat nou op die rak lê, heeltemal gebuig, omdat Dudley daarop gaan sit het. Van die rakke is vol boeke. Dis die enigste goed in die kamer wat lyk of niemand nog daaraan geraak het nie.

Harry hoor hoe Dudley 'n keel opsit en op sy ma skree: "Ek wil nie hê hy moet daar wees nie . . . ek het die kamer *nodig* . . . kry hom daar uit . . ."

Harry sug en strek hom uit op die bed. Net gister sou hy wat wou gee om hierdie kamer te kan hê. Vandag wil hy veel eerder in sy kas wees met sy brief, as hier bo, daarsonder.

Die volgende oggend met ontbyt is almal bra stil. Dudley is in 'n toestand van skok. Hy het geskree, sy pa met die Smeltings-stok geslaan, met opset gemaak of hy siek is, sy ma geskop en sy skilpad deur die kweekhuis se dak gegooi, maar hy is steeds sonder sy tweede slaapkamer. Harry dink aan die vorige dag hierdie tyd en wens bitterlik dat hy die brief in die gang oopgemaak het. Oom Vernon en tant Petunia kyk gelurig onrustig na mekaar.

Toe die pos kom, sê oom Vernon, wat lyk of hy hard probeer om gaaf met Harry te wees, dat Dudley dit moet gaan haal. Hulle hoor hoe Dudley die hele ent pad na die voorportaal met sy Smeltings-stok teen die meubels slaan. Toe skree hy, "Hier's nog een! *Mnr. H. Potter, Die kleinste Slaapkamer, Ligusterlaan 4* –"

Met 'n gesmoorde kreet spring oom Vernon uit sy stoel en hardloop portaal toe, met Harry kort op sy hakke. Oom Vernon moet Dudley grond toe stoei om die brief by hom af te vat. Dis ekstra moeilik, want Harry het oom Vernon van agter om die nek gegryp. Na 'n minuut se los gestoei, waarin almal behoorlik onder die Smeltings-stok deurgeloop het, steier oom Vernon orent. Hy snak na asem, maar hy het Harry se brief ferm in sy hand.

"Gaan na jou kas – ek bedoel, jou kamer," sê hy vir Harry en sy asem fluit in sy keel. "Dudley – loop – loop net."

Harry stap rond in sy nuwe kamer. Iemand weet dat hy uit die kas getrek het en weet ook dat hy nie die eerste brief gekry het nie. Dit moet beteken dat hulle weer gaan probeer? Hierdie keer gaan hy seker maak dat hulle slaag. Hy het 'n plan.

Sesuur die volgende oggend gaan die wekker af. Harry druk dit vinnig

dood en trek suutjies aan. Hy moet die Dursleys tog net nie wakker maak nie. Hy glip af ondertoe sonder om enige ligte aan te skakel.

Hy gaan wag tot die posman kom; dan gaan hy die eerste een wees om die briewe vir Ligusterlaan 4 te kry. Sy hart klop hoog in sy keel toe hy oor die donker portaal voordeur toe sluip –

“AAAAARRRG!”

Harry spring die lug in – hy’t op iets groots en sags getrap daar op die mat voor die deur – iets wat *lewe*!

Op die boonste verdieping gaan ligte aan en Harry besef tot sy ontnugtering dat die groot, sagte *iets* sy oom se gesig is. Oom Vernon lê in ’n slaapsak reg by die deur, duidelik om seker te maak dat Harry juis dit wat hy wou doen, nie sal regkry nie. ’n Volle halfuur lank skree hy op Harry, toe sê hy Harry moet vir hom ’n koppie tee gaan maak. Bekaf strompel Harry kombuis toe en teen die tyd dat hy terugkom, is die pos al daar, reg op oom Vernon se skoot. Harry sien drie briewe geadresseer in groen ink.

“Ek wil –” begin hy, maar oom Vernon skeur die briewe voor sy oë in stukkie.

Daardie dag gaan oom Vernon nie werk toe nie. Hy bly by die huis en spyker die briewegleuf toe.

“Sien,” verduidelik hy deur ’n mond vol spykers aan tant Petunia, “as hulle die goed nie kan *aflewer* nie, sal hulle ophou.”

“Ek weet nie of dit gaan werk nie, Vernon.”

“O, daardie goed se koppe werk anders, Petunia. Hulle dink nie soos ek en jy nie,” sê oom Vernon terwyl hy ’n spyker probeer inslaan met ’n stuk van die vrugtekoek wat tant Petunia so pas vir hom gebring het.

Daardie Vrydag daag nie minder as twaalf briewe vir Harry op nie. Omdat hulle nie deur die briewegleuf kan kom nie, is hulle onderdeur die deur gestoot, in by die kante, en ’n paar is selfs deur die klein venstertjie in die onderste toilet gedruk.

Oom Vernon bly weer tuis. Nadat hy al die briewe verbrand het, gaan haal hy ’n hamer en spykers en planke en slaan die gleuwe om die voordeur en om die agterdeur toe, sodat niemand kan uitkom nie. Die hele tyd neurie hy “Tiptoe through the Tulips” en hy wip van die skrik as hy die kleinste geluidjie hoor.

Saterdag begin sake hand-uit ruk. Vier-en-twintig briewe vir Harry daag op, klein opgerol en weggesteek binne-in twee dosyn eiers, wat ’n baie verwarde melkman deur die sitkamervenster vir tant Petunia aangee. Terwyl oom Vernon verwoed oproepe maak na die poskantoor en die melkery in ’n poging om iemand te kry teenoor wie hy kan kla, kap tant Petunia die briewe fyn en flenters in die voedselverwerker.

“Wie wil tog so graag met *jou* praat?” vra Dudley oorbluf vir Harry.

Sondagoggend sit oom Vernon aan vir ontbyt. Hy lyk moeg en siek, maar in sy skik.

“Geen pos op Sondae nie,” herinner hy almal tevrede en smeer marmelade op sy koerant, “geen verdomde briewe vandag nie —”

Die woorde is skaars koud of iets suis deur die skoorsteen in die kombuis en vang hom skrams teen die kop. Die volgende oomblik stortreën dertig, veertig briewe grond toe. Die Dursleys koes, maar Harry spring op en af en probeer een vang —

“Uit! UIT!”

Oom Vernon gryp Harry om die lyf en gooi hom in die portaal. Tant Petunia en Dudley hardloop uit met hul arms oor hul gesigte. Oom Vernon slaan die deur toe. Hulle hoor hoe nog briewe die vertrek binne-stroom en van die mure en die vloer afbons.

“Dis die einde,” sê oom Vernon. Hy probeer kalm bly, maar hy pluk bosse hare uit sy moestas. “Binne vyf minute moet almal hier wees, gereed om te ry. Ons gaan weg. Pak julle klere. G’n gestryery nie!”

Hy lyk so gevaarlik, so sonder die helfte van sy snor, dat niemand dit waag om teen te stribbel nie. Tien minute later het hulle ’n toegespykerde deur oopgewring en is hulle in die kar op pad snelweg toe. Dudley sit en snuif op die agterste sitplek; sy pa het hom ’n oorkonkel gegee omdat hy hulle opgehou het toe hy sy televisie, videomasjien en rekenaar in ’n sport-sak probeer inpak het.

Hulle ry. En hulle ry. Selfs tant Petunia vra nie waarheen hulle gaan nie. Elke nou en dan maak oom Vernon ’n skerp draai en ry eers weer ’n ent in die teenoorgestelde rigting.

“Moet hulle afskud . . . hulle afskud,” mompel hy elke keer dat hy dit doen.

Hulle stop nie eens een keer vir iets te ete of te drinke nie. Later kerm Dudley steen en been. So ’n aaklige dag het hy nog nooit tevore gehad nie. Hy’s honger, hy’t vyf televisieprogramme wat hy graag wou sien, gemis en hy’t nog nooit so lank moes uithou sonder dat hy ’n *alien* op die rekenaar opgeblaas het nie.

Uiteindelik hou oom Vernon voor ’n droefgeestige hotelletjie net buite ’n groot stad stil. Dudley en Harry deel ’n kamer met tweelingbedjies en bedompige, klam lakens. Dudley lê en snork, maar Harry is wakker. Hy sit op die vensterbank en staar na die ligte van die motors wat verbyry, en hy wonder . . .

Die volgende oggend eet hulle ou ontbytvlokkies en koue ingemaakte tamaties op roosterbrood vir ontbyt. Hulle is net klaar toe die hotel se eienaar nader stap.

“Skies tog, maar is een van julle dalk meneer H. Potter? Ek het om-trent ’n honderd hiervan daar voor by die toonbank.”

Sy hou ’n brief op sodat hulle die adres in groen letters kan lees:

Harry gryp na die brief, maar oom Vernon klap sy hand weg. Die vrou staar.

“Ek sal dit neem,” sê oom Vernon en staan vinnig op en stap agter haar aan.

“Moet ons nie eerder huis toe gaan nie, engel?” stel tant Petunia ’n paar uur later huiwerig voor, maar dis of oom Vernon haar nie hoor nie. Presies waarna hy soek, weet nugter. Hy ry tot in die middel van ’n groot woud, klim uit, kyk rond, skud sy kop, klim weer in en ry verder. Die-selfde ding gebeur in die middel van ’n geploegde land, halfpad oor ’n hangbrug en heel bo-op ’n enorme parkeergarage.

“Pa het mal geword, nè, Ma?” vra Dudley floutjies later die middag. Oom Vernon het langs die kus stilgehou, almal binne-in die kar toegesluit en verdwyn.

Dit begin reën. Groot druppels plof op die motor se dak. Dudley snuif.

“Dis Maandag,” sê hy vir sy ma. “Die Groot Humberto is vanaand op. Ek wil iewers bly waar daar *televisie* is.”

Maandag. Dit laat Harry aan iets dink. As dit Maandag is – en jy kan gewoonlik op Dudley reken om te weet watter dag van die week dit is, juis oor die televisie – dan is môre Dinsdag, Harry se elfde verjaardag. Sy verjaardae is natuurlik nooit juis prettig nie – laas jaar het die Dursleys vir hom ’n klerehanger en ’n paar van oom Vernon se ou kouse gegee. Maar ’n mens word darem nie elke dag elf nie.

Oom Vernon is terug en hy glimlag breed. Hy het ’n lang, dun pakkie by hom en antwoord nie toe tant Petunia vra wat hy alles gekoop het nie.

“Het die perfekte plek gekry!” sê hy. “Kom! Almal uit!”

Dis bitter koud buitekant die kar. Oom Vernon wys na iets wat soos ’n groot rots daar diep in die see lyk. Heel bo-op hurk die mistroostigste klein krotjie wat jy nog in jou lewe gesien het. Een ding staan soos ’n paal bo water, daar is nie televisie nie.

“Storms voorspel vir vannag!” sê oom Vernon in sy noppies en vryf sy hande. “En hierdie vriendelike heer leen sy boot vir ons!”

’n Tandelose ou man hobbels nader en wys met ’n onplesierige glimlag na die ou roeibootjie wat op die staalgrys water dobber.

“Ek het reeds rantsoene gereël,” sê oom Vernon, “so spring aan boord!”

Dis vriesend koud op die boot. Ysige seesproei en reën sypel by hul nekke in en ’n snerpende windjie piets hul deur die gesig. Na wat soos

ure voel, bereik hulle die rots en oom Vernon lei hulle, al glippend en glycnd, na die vervalte geboutjie.

Binne-in is dit aaklig; dit ruik skerp na seegras, die wind fluit deur die skrewe in die houtmure en die vuurmaakplek is nat en leeg. Daar is net twee vertrekke.

Oom Vernon se rantsoene bestaan uit 'n pakkie tjips vir elkeen en vier picsangs. Hy probeer 'n vuur aansteek, maar die leë tjipspakkies krimp op en maak rook.

"Kan doen met 'n hand vol van daardie briewe, h'm?" sê hy vrolik.

Hy is in 'n uitstekende bui. Dis duidelik dat hy reken dat niemand 'n kans staan om hier, en in 'n storm, te kom briewe aflewer nie. Harry moet stilweg saamstem, en dit laat hom glad nie beter voel nie.

Toe dit donker is, steek die beloofde storm op. Sproei spat van die hoë golwe af tot teen die mure en 'n sterk wind ratel die vuil vensters. Tant Petunia ontdek 'n paar muwwe komberse in die tweede kamer en maak vir Dudley 'n slaapplek op die motgevrete bank. Sy en oom Vernon gaan lê op die knopperige matras in die kamer langsaan en Harry soek die sagste kolletjie op die vloer en krul op onder die dunste, toingrigste kombers.

Soos die nag aanstap, woed die storm al sterker. Harry kan nie slaap nie. Hy bibber en beef en rol rond in 'n poging om net effens gemaklik te wees. Sy maag rammel, so honger is hy. Dudley se gesnork word verdrink deur die lae gerommel van die donderweer wat hier teen middernag los-trek. Die verligte wyserplaat van Dudley se horlosie wat oor die kant van die bed aan sy vet pols hang, vertel vir Harry dat hy oor tien minute elf jaar oud sal wees. Hy lê en kyk hoe sy verjaardag nader tik en wonder of die Dursleys gaan onthou. Hy wonder ook waar die skrywer van die briewe nou is.

Nog vyf minute. Harry hoor iets daar buite kraak. Hy hoop die dak val nie in nie, hoewel dit dalk warmer sal wees as dit wel sou gebeur. Miskien is die huis in Ligusterlaan teen hierdie tyd so vol briewe dat hy een sal kan gaps wanneer hulle tuiskom.

Nog drie minute. Is dit die branders wat so hard teen die rotse slaan? En (nog twee minute om te gaan) wat is daardie snaakse knarsgeluid? Is die rots besig om weg te kalwer in die see?

Nog een minuut, dan is hy elf. Dertig sekondes . . . twintig . . . tien . . . nege – dalk moet hy vir Dudley wakker skud, net om hom kwaad te maak – drie . . . twee . . . een . . .

KABOEM.

Die hele hut skud en Harry sit penorent en staar na die deur. Iemand klop daar buite. Iemand wil inkom.

CHAPTER FOUR



THE KEEPER OF THE KEYS

BOOM. They knocked again. Dudley jerked awake.
“Where’s the cannon?” he said stupidly.

There was a crash behind them and Uncle Vernon came skidding into the room. He was holding a rifle in his hands — now they knew what had been in the long, thin package he had brought with them.

“Who’s there?” he shouted. “I warn you — I’m armed!”

There was a pause. Then —

SMASH!

The door was hit with such force that it swung clean off its hinges and with a deafening crash landed flat on the floor.

A giant of a man was standing in the doorway. His face was almost completely hidden by a long, shaggy mane of hair and a wild, tangled beard, but you could make out his eyes, glinting like black beetles under all the hair.

The giant squeezed his way into the hut, stooping so that his head just brushed the ceiling. He bent down, picked up the door, and fitted it easily back into its frame. The noise of the storm outside dropped a little. He turned to look at them all.

“Couldn’t make us a cup o’ tea, could yeh? It’s not been an easy journey. . . .”

He strode over to the sofa where Dudley sat frozen with fear.

“Budge up, yeh great lump,” said the stranger.

Dudley squeaked and ran to hide behind his mother, who was crouching, terrified, behind Uncle Vernon.

“An’ here’s Harry!” said the giant.

Harry looked up into the fierce, wild, shadowy face and saw that the beetle eyes were crinkled in a smile.

“Las’ time I saw you, you was only a baby,” said the giant. “Yeh look a lot like yer dad, but yeh’ve got yer mum’s eyes.”

Uncle Vernon made a funny rasping noise.

“I demand that you leave at once, sir!” he said. “You are breaking and entering!”

“Ah, shut up, Dursley, yeh great prune,” said the giant; he reached over the back of the sofa, jerked the gun out of Uncle Vernon’s hands, bent it into a knot as easily as if it had been made of rubber, and threw it into a corner of the room.

Uncle Vernon made another funny noise, like a mouse being trodden on.

“Anyway — Harry,” said the giant, turning his back on the Dursleys, “a very happy birthday to yeh. Got summat fer yeh here — I mighta sat on it at some point, but it’ll taste all right.”

From an inside pocket of his black overcoat he pulled a slightly squashed box. Harry opened it with trembling fingers. Inside was a large, sticky chocolate cake with *Happy Birthday Harry* written on it in green icing.

Harry looked up at the giant. He meant to say thank you, but the words got lost on the way to his mouth, and what he said instead was, “Who are you?”

The giant chuckled.

“True, I haven’t introduced meself. Rubeus Hagrid, Keeper of Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts.”

He held out an enormous hand and shook Harry's whole arm.

"What about that tea then, eh?" he said, rubbing his hands together.

"I'd not say no ter summat stronger if yeh've got it, mind."

His eyes fell on the empty grate with the shriveled chip bags in it and he snorted. He bent down over the fireplace; they couldn't see what he was doing but when he drew back a second later, there was a roaring fire there. It filled the whole damp hut with flickering light and Harry felt the warmth wash over him as though he'd sunk into a hot bath.

The giant sat back down on the sofa, which sagged under his weight, and began taking all sorts of things out of the pockets of his coat: a copper kettle, a squashy package of sausages, a poker, a teapot, several chipped mugs, and a bottle of some amber liquid that he took a swig from before starting to make tea. Soon the hut was full of the sound and smell of sizzling sausage. Nobody said a thing while the giant was working, but as he slid the first six fat, juicy, slightly burnt sausages from the poker, Dudley fidgeted a little. Uncle Vernon said sharply, "Don't touch anything he gives you, Dudley."

The giant chuckled darkly.

"Yer great puddin' of a son don' need fattenin' anymore, Dursley, don' worry."

He passed the sausages to Harry, who was so hungry he had never tasted anything so wonderful, but he still couldn't take his eyes off the giant. Finally, as nobody seemed about to explain anything, he said, "I'm sorry, but I still don't really know who you are."

The giant took a gulp of tea and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

“Call me Hagrid,” he said, “everyone does. An’ like I told yeh, I’m Keeper of Keys at Hogwarts — yeh’ll know all about Hogwarts, o’ course.”

“Er — no,” said Harry.

Hagrid looked shocked.

“Sorry,” Harry said quickly.

“*Sorry?*” barked Hagrid, turning to stare at the Dursleys, who shrank back into the shadows. “It’s them as should be sorry! I knew yeh weren’t gettin’ yer letters but I never thought yeh wouldn’t even know abou’ Hogwarts, fer cryin’ out loud! Did yeh never wonder where yer parents learned it all?”

“All what?” asked Harry.

“ALL WHAT?” Hagrid thundered. “Now wait jus’ one second!”

He had leapt to his feet. In his anger he seemed to fill the whole hut. The Dursleys were cowering against the wall.

“Do you mean ter tell me,” he growled at the Dursleys, “that this boy — this boy! — knows nothin’ abou’ — about ANYTHING?”

Harry thought this was going a bit far. He had been to school, after all, and his marks weren’t bad.

“I know *some* things,” he said. “I can, you know, do math and stuff.”

But Hagrid simply waved his hand and said, “About *our* world, I mean. *Your* world. *My* world. *Yer parents’ world.*”

“What world?”

Hagrid looked as if he was about to explode.

“DURSLEY!” he boomed.

Uncle Vernon, who had gone very pale, whispered something that

sounded like “Mimblewimble.” Hagrid stared wildly at Harry.

“But yeh must know about yer mum and dad,” he said. “I mean, they’re *famous*. You’re *famous*.”

“What? My — my mum and dad weren’t famous, were they?”

“Yeh don’ know . . . yeh don’ know . . .” Hagrid ran his fingers through his hair, fixing Harry with a bewildered stare.

“Yeh don’ know what yeh *are*?” he said finally.

Uncle Vernon suddenly found his voice.

“Stop!” he commanded. “Stop right there, sir! I forbid you to tell the boy anything!”

A braver man than Vernon Dursley would have quailed under the furious look Hagrid now gave him; when Hagrid spoke, his every syllable trembled with rage.

“You never told him? Never told him what was in the letter Dumbledore left fer him? I was there! I saw Dumbledore leave it, Dursley! An’ you’ve kept it from him all these years?”

“Kept *what* from me?” said Harry eagerly.

“STOP! I FORBID YOU!” yelled Uncle Vernon in panic.

Aunt Petunia gave a gasp of horror.

“Ah, go boil yer heads, both of yeh,” said Hagrid. “Harry — yer a wizard.”

There was silence inside the hut. Only the sea and the whistling wind could be heard.

“I’m a what?” gasped Harry.

“A wizard, o’ course,” said Hagrid, sitting back down on the sofa, which groaned and sank even lower, “an’ a thumpin’ good’un, I’d say, once yeh’ve been trained up a bit. With a mum an’ dad like yours,

what else would yeh be? An' I reckon it's abou' time yeh read yer letter."

Harry stretched out his hand at last to take the yellowish envelope, addressed in emerald green to Mr. H. Potter, The Floor, Hut-on-the-Rock, The Sea. He pulled out the letter and read:

HOGWARTS SCHOOL
of WITCHCRAFT and WIZARDRY

Headmaster: Albus Dumbledore
(*Order of Merlin, First Class, Grand Sorc., Chf. Warlock, Supreme Mugwump, International Confed. of Wizards*)

Dear Mr. Potter,

We are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Please find enclosed a list of all necessary books and equipment.

Term begins on September 1. We await your owl by no later than July 31.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Minerva McGonagall". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Minerva McGonagall,
Deputy Headmistress

Questions exploded inside Harry's head like fireworks and he couldn't decide which to ask first. After a few minutes he stammered, "What does it mean, they await my owl?"

“Gallop in’ Gorgons, that reminds me,” said Hagrid, clapping a hand to his forehead with enough force to knock over a cart horse, and from yet another pocket inside his overcoat he pulled an owl — a real, live, rather ruffled-looking owl — a long quill, and a roll of parchment. With his tongue between his teeth he scribbled a note that Harry could read upside down:

*Dear Professor Dumbledore,
Given Harry his letter.
Taking him to buy his things tomorrow.
Weather’s horrible. Hope you’re well.
Hagrid*

Hagrid rolled up the note, gave it to the owl, which clamped it in its beak, went to the door, and threw the owl out into the storm. Then he came back and sat down as though this was as normal as talking on the telephone.

Harry realized his mouth was open and closed it quickly.

“Where was I?” said Hagrid, but at that moment, Uncle Vernon, still ashen-faced but looking very angry, moved into the firelight.

“He’s not going,” he said.

Hagrid grunted.

“I’d like ter see a great Muggle like you stop him,” he said.

“A what?” said Harry, interested.

“A Muggle,” said Hagrid, “it’s what we call nonmagic folk like them. An’ it’s your bad luck you grew up in a family o’ the biggest Muggles I ever laid eyes on.”

“We swore when we took him in we’d put a stop to that rubbish,”

said Uncle Vernon, “swore we’d stamp it out of him! Wizard indeed!”

“You *knew*?” said Harry. “You *knew* I’m a — a wizard?”

“Knew!” shrieked Aunt Petunia suddenly. “*Knew*! Of course we knew! How could you not be, my dratted sister being what she was? Oh, she got a letter just like that and disappeared off to that — that *school* — and came home every vacation with her pockets full of frog spawn, turning teacups into rats. I was the only one who saw her for what she was — a freak! But for my mother and father, oh no, it was Lily this and Lily that, they were proud of having a witch in the family!”

She stopped to draw a deep breath and then went ranting on. It seemed she had been wanting to say all this for years.

“Then she met that Potter at school and they left and got married and had you, and of course I knew you’d be just the same, just as strange, just as — as — *abnormal* — and then, if you please, she went and got herself blown up and we got landed with you!”

Harry had gone very white. As soon as he found his voice he said, “Blown up? You told me they died in a car crash!”

“CAR CRASH!” roared Hagrid, jumping up so angrily that the Dursleys scuttled back to their corner. “How could a car crash kill Lily an’ James Potter? It’s an outrage! A scandal! Harry Potter not knowin’ his own story when every kid in our world knows his name!”

“But why? What happened?” Harry asked urgently.

The anger faded from Hagrid’s face. He looked suddenly anxious.

“I never expected this,” he said, in a low, worried voice. “I had no

idea, when Dumbledore told me there might be trouble gettin' hold of yeh, how much yeh didn't know. Ah, Harry, I don' know if I'm the right person ter tell yeh — but someone's gotta — yeh can't go off ter Hogwarts not knowin'."

He threw a dirty look at the Dursleys.

"Well, it's best yeh know as much as I can tell yeh — mind, I can't tell yeh everythin', it's a great myst'ry, parts of it. . . ."

He sat down, stared into the fire for a few seconds, and then said, "It begins, I suppose, with — with a person called — but it's incredible yeh don't know his name, everyone in our world knows —"

"Who?"

"Well — I don' like sayin' the name if I can help it. No one does."

"Why not?"

"Gulpin' gargoyles, Harry, people are still scared. Blimey, this is difficult. See, there was this wizard who went . . . bad. As bad as you could go. Worse. Worse than worse. His name was . . ."

Hagrid gulped, but no words came out.

"Could you write it down?" Harry suggested.

"Nah — can't spell it. All right — *Voldemort*." Hagrid shuddered. "Don' make me say it again. Anyway, this — this wizard, about twenty years ago now, started lookin' fer followers. Got 'em, too — some were afraid, some just wanted a bit o' his power, 'cause he was gettin' himself power, all right. Dark days, Harry. Didn't know who ter trust, didn't dare get friendly with strange wizards or witches . . . terrible things happened. He was takin' over. 'Course, some stood up to him — an' he killed 'em. Horribly. One o' the only safe places left

was Hogwarts. Reckon Dumbledore's the only one You-Know-Who was afraid of. Didn't dare try takin' the school, not jus' then, anyway.

"Now, yer mum an' dad were as good a witch an' wizard as I ever knew. Head boy an' girl at Hogwarts in their day! Suppose the myst'ry is why You-Know-Who never tried to get 'em on his side before . . . probably knew they were too close ter Dumbledore ter want anythin' ter do with the Dark Side.

"Maybe he thought he could persuade 'em . . . maybe he just wanted 'em outta the way. All anyone knows is, he turned up in the village where you was all living, on Halloween ten years ago. You was just a year old. He came ter yer house an' — an' — "

Hagrid suddenly pulled out a very dirty, spotted handkerchief and blew his nose with a sound like a foghorn.

"Sorry," he said. "But it's that sad — knew yer mum an' dad, an' nicer people yeh couldn't find — anyway . . .

"You-Know-Who killed 'em. An' then — an' this is the real myst'ry of the thing — he tried to kill you, too. Wanted ter make a clean job of it, I suppose, or maybe he just liked killin' by then. But he couldn't do it. Never wondered how you got that mark on yer forehead? That was no ordinary cut. That's what yeh get when a powerful, evil curse touches yeh — took care of yer mum an' dad an' yer house, even — but it didn't work on you, an' that's why yer famous, Harry. No one ever lived after he decided ter kill 'em, no one except you, an' he'd killed some o' the best witches an' wizards of the age — the McKinnons, the Bones, the Prewetts — an' you was only a baby, an' you lived."

Something very painful was going on in Harry's mind. As Hagrid's

story came to a close, he saw again the blinding flash of green light, more clearly than he had ever remembered it before — and he remembered something else, for the first time in his life: a high, cold, cruel laugh.

Hagrid was watching him sadly.

“Took yeh from the ruined house myself, on Dumbledore’s orders. Brought yeh ter this lot . . .”

“Load of old tosh,” said Uncle Vernon. Harry jumped; he had almost forgotten that the Dursleys were there. Uncle Vernon certainly seemed to have got back his courage. He was glaring at Hagrid and his fists were clenched.

“Now, you listen here, boy,” he snarled, “I accept there’s something strange about you, probably nothing a good beating wouldn’t have cured — and as for all this about your parents, well, they were weirdos, no denying it, and the world’s better off without them in my opinion — asked for all they got, getting mixed up with these wizarding types — just what I expected, always knew they’d come to a sticky end —”

But at that moment, Hagrid leapt from the sofa and drew a battered pink umbrella from inside his coat. Pointing this at Uncle Vernon like a sword, he said, “I’m warning you, Dursley — I’m warning you — one more word . . .”

In danger of being speared on the end of an umbrella by a bearded giant, Uncle Vernon’s courage failed again; he flattened himself against the wall and fell silent.

“That’s better,” said Hagrid, breathing heavily and sitting back down on the sofa, which this time sagged right down to the floor.

Harry, meanwhile, still had questions to ask, hundreds of them.

“But what happened to Vol-, sorry — I mean, You-Know-Who?”

“Good question, Harry. Disappeared. Vanished. Same night he tried ter kill you. Makes yeh even more famous. That’s the biggest myst’ry, see . . . he was gettin’ more an’ more powerful — why’d he go?

“Some say he died. Codswallop, in my opinion. Dunno if he had enough human left in him to die. Some say he’s still out there, bidin’ his time, like, but I don’ believe it. People who was on his side came back ter ours. Some of ’em came outta kinda trances. Don’ reckon they could’ve done if he was comin’ back.

“Most of us reckon he’s still out there somewhere but lost his powers. Too weak to carry on. ’Cause somethin’ about you finished him, Harry. There was somethin’ goin’ on that night he hadn’t counted on — *I* dunno what it was, no one does — but somethin’ about you stumped him, all right.”

Hagrid looked at Harry with warmth and respect blazing in his eyes, but Harry, instead of feeling pleased and proud, felt quite sure there had been a horrible mistake. A wizard? Him? How could he possibly be? He’d spent his life being clouted by Dudley, and bullied by Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon; if he was really a wizard, why hadn’t they been turned into warty toads every time they’d tried to lock him in his cupboard? If he’d once defeated the greatest sorcerer in the world, how come Dudley had always been able to kick him around like a football?

“Hagrid,” he said quietly, “I think you must have made a mistake. I don’t think I can be a wizard.”

To his surprise, Hagrid chuckled.

“Not a wizard, eh? Never made things happen when you was scared or angry?”

Harry looked into the fire. Now he came to think about it . . . every odd thing that had ever made his aunt and uncle furious with him had happened when he, Harry, had been upset or angry . . . chased by Dudley’s gang, he had somehow found himself out of their reach . . . dreading going to school with that ridiculous haircut, he’d managed to make it grow back . . . and the very last time Dudley had hit him, hadn’t he got his revenge, without even realizing he was doing it? Hadn’t he set a boa constrictor on him?

Harry looked back at Hagrid, smiling, and saw that Hagrid was positively beaming at him.

“See?” said Hagrid. “Harry Potter, not a wizard — you wait, you’ll be right famous at Hogwarts.”

But Uncle Vernon wasn’t going to give in without a fight.

“Haven’t I told you he’s not going?” he hissed. “He’s going to Stonewall High and he’ll be grateful for it. I’ve read those letters and he needs all sorts of rubbish — spell books and wands and —”

“If he wants ter go, a great Muggle like you won’t stop him,” growled Hagrid. “Stop Lily an’ James Potter’s son goin’ ter Hogwarts! Yer mad. His name’s been down ever since he was born. He’s off ter the finest school of witchcraft and wizardry in the world. Seven years there and he won’t know himself. He’ll be with youngsters of his own sort, fer a change, an’ he’ll be under the greatest headmaster Hogwarts ever had, Albus Dumbled —”

“I AM NOT PAYING FOR SOME CRACKPOT OLD FOOL TO

TEACH HIM MAGIC TRICKS!” yelled Uncle Vernon.

But he had finally gone too far. Hagrid seized his umbrella and whirled it over his head, “NEVER —” he thundered, “— INSULT — ALBUS — DUMBLEDORE — IN — FRONT — OF — ME!”

He brought the umbrella swishing down through the air to point at Dudley — there was a flash of violet light, a sound like a firecracker, a sharp squeal, and the next second, Dudley was dancing on the spot with his hands clasped over his fat bottom, howling in pain. When he turned his back on them, Harry saw a curly pig’s tail poking through a hole in his trousers.

Uncle Vernon roared. Pulling Aunt Petunia and Dudley into the other room, he cast one last terrified look at Hagrid and slammed the door behind them.

Hagrid looked down at his umbrella and stroked his beard.

“Shouldn’ta lost me temper,” he said ruefully, “but it didn’t work anyway. Meant ter turn him into a pig, but I suppose he was so much like a pig anyway there wasn’t much left ter do.”

He cast a sideways look at Harry under his bushy eyebrows.

“Be grateful if yeh didn’t mention that ter anyone at Hogwarts,” he said. “I’m — er — not supposed ter do magic, strictly speakin’. I was allowed ter do a bit ter follow yeh an’ get yer letters to yeh an’ stuff — one o’ the reasons I was so keen ter take on the job —”

“Why aren’t you supposed to do magic?” asked Harry.

“Oh, well — I was at Hogwarts meself but I — er — got expelled, ter tell yeh the truth. In me third year. They snapped me wand in half an’ everything. But Dumbledore let me stay on as gamekeeper. Great man, Dumbledore.”

“Why were you expelled?”

“It’s gettin’ late and we’ve got lots ter do tomorrow,” said Hagrid loudly. “Gotta get up ter town, get all yer books an’ that.”

He took off his thick black coat and threw it to Harry.

“You can kip under that,” he said. “Don’ mind if it wriggles a bit, I think I still got a couple o’ dormice in one o’ the pockets.”

Die Bewaarder van die Sleutels

KABOEM. Weer klop die persoon. Dudley ruk wakker.

“Waar’s die kanon?” vra hy deur die slaap.

Daar is ’n slag agter hulle en oom Vernon gly tot binne-in die kamer. Hy hou ’n geweer vas – nou weet hulle wat in die lang, dun pakkie was wat hy saamgebring het.

“Wie’s daar?” skreeu hy. “Ek waarsku jou – ek is gewapen!” Daar is ’n stilte. Dan –

KRAAK!

Die deur word met soveel geweld gemoker dat dit uit sy skarniere breek en met ’n oorverdowende slag plat op die grond val.

’n Reus van ’n man staan in die opening. Sy gesig is so te sê versteek onder lang, ruie hare en ’n woeste gekoekte bos baard, maar jy kan darem sy oë sien wat soos klein swart kewertjies tussen al die hare blink.

Die reus skuur halfgebukkend by die hut in, sodat sy kop net-net aan die plafon raak. Hy tel die deur op en druk dit maklik terug in die kosyn. Die geraas van die storm daar buite bedaar effens. Hy draai om en kyk na hulle.

“Kan doen met ’n koppie tee, of wat sê ek alles? Dit was glad nie ’n maklike reis nie . . .”

Hy stap na die bank waar Dudley sit, koud geskrik.

“Skuif op, jou groot lummel,” sê die vreemdeling.

Dudley gil en gaan kruip agter sy ma in. Sy staan gebukkend agter oom Vernon en lyk doodbang.

“En hier’s Harry!” sê die reus.

Harry kyk op in die wilde, kwaai gesig onder die yslike bos hare en hy sien hoe die kewerogies verkreukel en glimlag.

“Laas toe ek jou gesien het, was jy pure baba,” sê die reus. “Jy lyk baie soos jou pa, maar jy’t jou ma se oë.”

Oom Vernon maak ’n snaakse rasperagtige geluid.

“Ek eis dat jy nou dadelik loop, meneer!” sê hy. “Dit is onregmatige betreding!”

“Ag sjarrap, Dursley, jou ou suurknol,” sê die reus. Hy steek ’n hand

uit, ruk die geweer uit oom Vernon se hande en buig dit in 'n bondeltjie, so maklik asof dit van rubber gemaak is. Toe slinger hy dit na die hoek van die vertrek.

Oom Vernon maak nog 'n snaakse geluid, soos 'n muis as iemand daarop trap.

"In elk geval, Harry," sê die reus, terwyl hy sy rug op die Dursleys draai, "baie geluk met jou verjaardag. Het iets hier vir jou – het dalk daarop gesit, maar dit sal nog steeds vorentoe smaak."

Hy haal 'n ietwat papgedrukte doos uit sy swart mantel se binnesak. Met bewende vingers maak Harry dit oop. Binne-in is 'n groot, taai sjokoladekoek waarop *Lekker verjaar Harry* in groen versiersuiker staan.

Harry kyk op na die reus. Hy wil nog dankie sê, maar op pad na sy mond raak die woorde weg en al wat hy uitkry is, "Wie is jy?"

Die reus proeslag.

"Ek het myself sowaar nog nie voorgestel nie. Rubeus Hagrid, Bewaarder van die Sleutels en Boswagter by Hogwarts."

Hy hou 'n enorme hand uit en skud Harry se hele arm.

"Hoe lyk dit met daardie tee, hè?" vra hy dan en vryf sy hande teen mekaar. "Ek sal ook nie nee sê vir iets sterkers nie, gehoor."

Sy oë val op die leë vuurherd met die verskrompelde tjijsakkies en hy snork. Hy buk oor die kaggel; hulle kan glad nie sien wat hy doen nie, maar toe hy 'n rukkie later orent kom, brand daar 'n knetterende vuur. Dit vul die hele klam hut met 'n flikkerende lig en Harry voel hoe die hitte deur hom vloei, net soos wanneer hy in 'n lekker warm bad wegsink.

Die reus gaan sit op die bank, wat meegee onder sy gewig, en begin allerhande goed uit sy jas se sakke haal: 'n koperketel, 'n papperige sak wors, 'n vuuryster, 'n teepot, 'n paar gekraakte bekiers en 'n bottel vol amberkleurige vloeistof waarvan hy 'n vinnige sluk neem voor hy die tee begin maak. Sommer gou is die hut gevul met die geluid en die geur van sissende wors. Niemand sê 'n woord terwyl die reus werk nie, maar toe hy die eerste ses sappige, effens gebrande worsies van die vuuryster laat gly, kriewel Dudley so effens. Oom Vernon sê skerp, "Jy raak aan niks wat die man jou wil gee nie, Dudley."

Die reus grinnik stilletjies.

"Jou groot, dik pokkel van 'n seun hoef nie nog verder vet gevoer te word nie, Dursley, so ontspan."

Hy gee die worsies vir Harry aan. Harry is so honger, niks het nog ooit so lekker gesmaak nie, maar hy kan steeds nie sy oë van die reus afhou nie. Uiteindelik, toe dit lyk of niemand enigiets gaan verduidelik nie, sê hy, "Verskoon my, maar ek weet nog steeds nie wie u is nie."

Die reus neem 'n groot sluk tee en vee sy mond met die agterkant van sy hand af.

"Noem my Hagrid," sê hy, "almal noem my so. En soos ek netnou vir

jou gesê het, ek is die bewaarder van die sleutels by Hogwarts – jy weet natuurlik alles van Hogwarts af.”

“H’m – nee,” sê Harry.

Hagrid lyk geskok.

“Ek’s jammer,” sê Harry vinnig.

“Jammer?” blaf Hagrid en staar na die Dursleys wat in die skaduwees retireer. “Dis hulle wat jammer moet wees! Ek’t geweet jy kry nie jou briewe nie, maar ek’t nie geweet jy weet niks van Hogwarts af nie, my goeiste! Het jy nog nooit gewonder waar jou ouers alles geleer het nie?”

“Wat alles?” vra Harry.

“WAT ALLES?” brul Hagrid. “Nou wag ’n bietjie!”

Hy het opgespring. In sy woede lyk dit of hy die hele hut vol staan. Die Dursleys krimp ineen teen die mure.

“Wil julle vir my vertel,” grom hy teenoor die Dursleys, “dat hierdie seun – hierdie seun! – niks weet van – van ENIGIETS nie?”

Vir Harry gaan hy nou te ver. Hy gaan darem skool en sy punte is glad nie sleg nie.

“Ek weet ’n paar dinge,” sê hy. “Ek kan somme en goed doen.”

Maar Hagrid waai met sy hand en sê, “Van ons wêreld, dis wat ek bedoel. Jou wêreld. My wêreld. Jou ouers se wêreld.”

“Watter wêreld?”

Hagrid lyk of hy gaan ontplof.

“DURSLEY!” bulder hy.

Oom Vernon, wat baie bleek geword het, fluister iets wat soos “Mimpelwimpel” klink. Hagrid staar verwilderd na Harry.

“Maar jy moet van jou ma en pa weet,” sê hy. “Ek meen, hulle is beroemd! Jy is beroemd!”

“Wat? My – my ma en pa was nie regtig beroemd nie, of . . . was hulle?”

“Jy weet nie . . . jy weet nie . . .” Hagrid trek sy vingers deur sy hare en staar opnuut verwilderd na Harry. “Jy weet nie wie jy is nie?” sê hy uiteindelik.

Net toe vind oom Vernon sy stem.

“Stop!” beveel hy. “Stop net daar, meneer! Ek verbied jou om die seun enigiets te vertel!”

’n Dapperder man as Vernon Dursley sou verwelk het onder die briesende blik in Hagrid se oë. Toe Hagrid praat, is dit of elke lettergreep van woede bewe.

“Julle het hom nooit vertel nie? Nooit vertel wat in die brief staan wat Dompeldorius vir hom gelos het nie? Ek was daar! Ek het gesien toe Dompeldorius dit by hom neersit, Dursley! En julle het dit al die jare vir hom weggesteek?”

“Wat vir my weggesteek?” vra Harry gretig.

“STIL! EK VERBIED JOU!” gil oom Vernon paniekerig.

Tant Petunia snak na asem.

“Ag, gaan bars, albei van julle,” sê Hagrid. “Harry – jy’s ’n towenaar.”

Dit is stil in die hut. Net die see en die suisende wind kan gehoor word.

“Ek is ’n wat?” vra Harry hygend.

“’n Towenaar, natuurlik,” sê Hagrid en gaan sit weer op die bank wat knars en nog laer sak, “en ’n flippen goeie een ook, veral as jy eers ’n bietjie geoefen het. Met ’n ma en pa soos joune, kan jy nie iets anders wees nie. En ek sou sê dis hoog tyd dat jy jou brief lees.”

Harry steek sy hand uit en neem die gelerige koevert, geadresseer in groen ink aan Mnr. H. Potter, Die Vloer, Hut-op-die-Rotse, Die See. Hy haal die brief uit en lees:

HOGWARTS SKOOL VIR TOWERKUNS EN HEKSERY

Skoolhoof: Albus Dompeldorius

(Orde van Merlin, Eerste Klas, Aartstow., Opperste Goëlaar, Grootste Kokkedoor, Internasionale Konfed. van Towenaars)

Geagte mnr. Potter

Dit is met trots dat ons u meedeel dat u toegelaat is tot die Hogwarts Skool vir Towerkuns en Heksery. Hierby ingesluit is ’n lys van al die nodige boeke en ander toerusting.

Die kwartaal begin op 1 September. Ons verwag u uil teen nie later as 31 Julie nie.

Die uwe

Minerva McGonagall

Onderhoof

Vrae ontplof soos vuurwerke in Harry se kop en hy kan nie besluit wat hy eerste moet vra nie. Na ’n paar minute stamel hy, “Wat beteken dit, hulle verwag my uil?”

“Grote Griet, nou onthou ek,” sê Hagrid en hy slaan sy hand teen sy voorkop met soveel geweld dat ’n karperd daarvan kon omval. Uit ’n ander sak aan die binnekant van sy oorjas haal hy ’n uil uit – ’n regte, lewende, ietwat verfrommelde uil – ’n lang veerpen en ’n rol perkament. Met sy tong tussen sy tande krabbel hy ’n nota wat Harry onderstebo kan lees:

Geagte professor Dompeldorius

Het vir Harry sy brief gegee. Neem hom môre om sy goed te koop. Weer is verskriklik. Hoop dit gaan goed.

Hagrid

Hagrid rol die nota op, gee dit vir die uil, wat dit vasklem in sy snawel, en stap deur toe om die voël buite in die storm uit te gooi. Toe kom hy terug en gaan sit, asof dit net so alledaags is as om iemand te bel.

Harry besef dat sy mond oophang en hy klap dit vinnig toe.

“Waar was ek?” vra Hagrid, maar op daardie oomblik beweeg oom Vernon tot in die lig van die vuur. Hy is nog steeds grys in die gesig, maar dis duidelik dat hy briesend kwaad is.

“Hy gaan nie,” sê hy.

Hagrid snork.

“Ek sien al hoe stop ’n Moggel soos jy hom,” sê hy.

“n Wat?” sê Harry, geïnteresseerd.

“n Moggel,” sê Hagrid. “Dis wat ons mense soos hulle wat nie kan toor nie, noem. En dis regtig jammer dat jy moes grootword by die grootste spul Moggels wat ek nog ooit gesien het.”

“Toe ons hom ingeneem het, het ons gesweer dat ons hierdie boel twak gaan stopsit,” sê oom Vernon, “ons het gesweer ons gaan hom daarvan genees! Towenaar, nogal!”

“Julle het geweet?” sê Harry. “Julle het geweet dat ek ’n – ’n towenaar is?”

“Geweet!” kryns tant Petunia skielik. “Geweet! Natuurlik het ons geweet! Hoe kan jy iets anders wees met daardie vervlakste suster van my as ’n ma? O, sy het net so ’n brief gekry en na daardie – daardie skool verdwyn en elke vakansie teruggekom met haar sakke vol paddaeiers en teekoppies wat sy in rotte verander. Ek was die enigste een wat deur haar kon sien – ’n *natuurfrats*! Maar vir my ma en pa, o, nee, dit was Lily dit en Lily dat, hulle was net te trots dat daar ’n heks in die gesin is!”

Sy breek af en haal diep asem en skel dan voort. Dis of sy al hierdie dinge al jare lank opkrop.

“Toe ontmoet sy daardie Potter by die skool en hulle trou en jy word gebore en natuurlik het ek geweet jy gaan net soos hulle wees, net so raar, net so – so – *abnormaal* – en toe, bid jou aan, gaan blaas sy haarself so wraggies op en van toe af sit ons met jou opgeskeep!”

Harry is spierwit in die gesig. Toe hy uiteindelik sy stembuis kry, sê hy, “Opgeblaas? Ek dag hulle is dood in ’n motorongeluk!”

“MOTORONGELUK!” brul Hagrid en spring op met soveel woede dat die Dursleys opnuut na hul hoek skarrel. “Hoe kan ’n motorongeluk vir Lily en James Potter doodmaak? Dis ’n wandaad! ’n Skandaal! Dat Harry Potter nie sy eie storie ken nie, terwyl elke kind in ons wêreld weet wat sy naam is!”

“Maar hoekom? Wat het gebeur?” vra Harry dringend.

Die woede verdwyn uit Hagrid se gesig. Skielik lyk hy angstig.

“Dit het ek nou regtig nie verwag nie,” sê hy in ’n gedempte, bekommerde stem. “Toe Dompeldorius gesê het ek moet my regmaak vir moeilikheid wanneer ek jou gaan haal, het ek nie gedink jy weet so min van alles af nie. Ai, Harry, ek’s nie die regte ou om jou te vertel nie – maar iemand moet seker – jy kan nie Hogwarts toe gaan as jy niks weet nie.”

Hy gooi ’n vuil kyk in die Dursleys se rigting.

“Wel, dis seker die beste as jy eers weet soveel as wat ek jou kan vertel – onthou net, ek weet nie alles nie, dele is baie deurmekaar . . .”

Hy gaan sit en staar ’n paar sekondes in die vuur en sê toe, “Dit het alles begin, so skat ek, met – met ’n persoon met die naam – maar dis net ongelooflik dat jy nie eens sy naam ken nie, almal in ons wêreld weet –”

“Wat is sy naam?”

“Wel – ek sê nie graag sy naam as ek dit kan help nie. Niemand doen dit nie.”

“Hoekom nie?”

“Vadertjie, Harry, die mense is nog altyd bang. Heng, dit is vervlaks moeilik. Sien, daar was hierdie towenaar wat . . . wat sleg geword het. So sleg as kan kom. Erger. Erger as erg. Sy naam is . . .”

Hagrid sluk, maar geen woord kom uit nie.

“Kan jy dit neerskryf?” stel Harry voor.

“Nee – kan dit nie spel nie. Goed dan – *Woldemort*.” Hagrid sidder. “Moet my dit nooit weer maak sê nie. In elk geval, hierdie – so twintig jaar gelede het hierdie towenaar mense begin soek om hom te volg. Ge-kry ook – party was bang, ander wou net ’n deel van sy mag hê, want hy’t allerhande magte gehad. Donker dae, Harry. Nie geweet wie jy kan vertrou nie, kon nie vriende wees met enige heks of towenaar nie . . . vreeslike dinge het gebeur. Hy’t oorgeneem. Tuurlik was party mense teen hom – en hy’t hulle vermoor. Grusaam. Een van die min veilige plekke oor, was Hogwarts. Reken Dompeldorius was die enigste een vir wie Jy-Weet-Wie bang was. Kon nie waag om die skool te probeer oorneem nie, in elk geval, nie toe nie.

“Nou, jou ma en pa tel onder die beste hekse en towenaars wat ek al geken het. Hoofseun en hoofdogter by Hogwarts op hul dag! Snaaks dat Jy-weet-Wie nooit probeer het om hulle aan sy kant te kry nie . . . het seker geweet hulle is te na aan Dompeldorius om iets met die Donker Kant te doen wil hê.

“Maar dalk het hy gedink hy kan hulle tog oorreed . . . of anders wou hy net van hulle ontslae raak. Al wat ons weet, is dat hy tien jaar gelede, op Allerheiligeaand, na die dorpie is waar julle gewoon het. Jy was toe net ’n jaar oud. Hy’t na jul huis gegaan en – en –”

Hagrid haal 'n baie vuil kolletjiesakdoek uit sy sak en blaas sy neus met 'n geluid wat soos 'n mishoring klink.

“Jammer,” sê hy, “maar dis so tragies – het jou ma en pa geken en hulle was die wonderlikste mense en – in elk geval –” hy snuif hard, “Jy-Weet-Wie het hulle vermoor. En toe – en dis die grootste raaisel van alles – toe’t hy jou ook probeer doodmaak. Wou seker skoonskip maak, of dalk was dit net vir hom lekker om te moor. Maar hy kon dit nie regkry nie. Het jy al oor daardie merk op jou voorkop gewonder? Dis nie 'n gewone litteken nie. Dis wat 'n mens kry as 'n kragtige bose vloek jou tref – het jou ma en pa doodgemaak en selfs jul huis verwoes – maar dit het nie op jou gewerk nie, Harry, en dis hoekom jy beroemd is. Niemand het nog ooit gelewe na hy besluit het om hulle dood te maak nie, niemand nie, net jy, en hy’t van die beste hekse en towenaars van sy tyd vermoor – die McKinnons, die Brewisse, die Petoorse – en jy was baie klein, maar jy’t bly leef.”

'n Pynlike herinnering gaan deur Harry se gemoed. Soos Hagrid se storie sy einde nader, sien hy weer die verblindende groen lig, helderder as ooit tevore – en hy onthou iets anders, vir die eerste keer in sy lewe – 'n skel, koue, wrede kekkellag.

Hagrid kyk na hom met hartseer in sy oë.

“Het jou self uit die wrak van 'n huis gaan haal, op Dompeldorius se bevel. Het jou na hierdie spul gebring en . . .”

“Boel ou twak,” sê oom Vernon. Harry wip, hy het skoon van die Dursleys vergeet. Dit lyk of oom Vernon nuwe moed geskep het. Hy gluur na Hagrid en sy vuiste is gebal.

“Luister jy mooi vir my, seun,” snou hy. “Ek gee toe dat daar iets eienaardigs aan jou is, seker niks wat 'n goeie pak slae nie kan regsien nie – en al die bog oor jou ouers, wel, hulle was getik, ek sê jou, en die wêreld is beter daaraan toe sonder hulle, as jy my vra – gekry wat hulle gesoek het, verbeel jou, deurmekaar met towenaars – net wat ek nog altyd verwag het, het geweet hulle gaan 'n nare einde hê –”

Op daardie oomblik spring Hagrid van die bank op en pluk 'n gehawende pienk sambreel uit sy jas. Soos 'n swaard rig hy dit op oom Vernon en sê, “Ek waarsku jou, Dursley – ek waarsku jou – nog een woord . . .”

Die moontlikheid dat hierdie bebaarde reus hom soos 'n sosatie op die sambreel gaan ryg, is te veel vir oom Vernon. Hy smeer homself plat teen die muur en bly tjoepstil.

“Dis beter,” sê Hagrid. Hy haal swaar asem en val weer neer op die bank wat teen hierdie tyd al tot op die vloer gesak het.

Daar is honderde goed wat Harry wil weet.

“Maar wat het van Wolde – 'skuus – ek bedoel, Jy-Weet-Wie geword?”

“Goeie vraag, Harry. Verdwyn. Skoonveld. 'Selfde aand wat hy jou pro-

leer doodmaak het. Maak jou nog meer beroemd. Dis die grootste raaisel, sien . . . hy't al hoe meer magtig geraak – so, hoekom is hy weg?

“Party sê hy's dood. Bog, sou ek sê. Weet nie of daar genoeg mens in hom oor was om te kon doodgaan nie. Ander sê hy's nog daar iewers. Wag sy tyd af, maar ek glo dit nie. Mense wat aan sy kant was, het teruggekom na ons toe. Party het uit soort van beswymings wakker geword. Dink nie hulle sou dit kon doen as hy nog gelewe het nie.

“Die meeste van ons dink hy's daar iewers, maar dat hy sy magte verloor het. Te swak om voort te gaan. Moet iets aan jou gewees het wat hom swak gemaak het, Harry. Iets het daardie nag gebeur waarop hy nie gereken het nie – ek weet nie wat nie, niemand weet nie – maar iets aan jou het hom gestuit, vir seker.”

Hagrid kyk na Harry met warmte en respek in sy oë, maar pleks dat Harry in sy skik is en trots voel, is hy al hoe meer oortuig dat iemand iewers 'n yslike flater maak. 'n Towenaar? Hy? Hoe kan dit wees? Sy lewe lank is hy deur Dudley geboelie en deur tant Petunia en oom Vernon afgeknou; as hy dan nou regtig 'n towenaar is, hoekom het hulle nie in vratterige paddas verander elke keer dat hulle hom in sy kas toegesluit het nie? As hy regtig die grootste towenaar in die wêreld verslaan het, hoe kon Dudley hom soos 'n voetbal rondgeskop het?

“Hagrid,” sê hy saggies, “ek dink jy maak 'n fout. Ek is nie 'n towenaar nie.”

Tot sy verbasing grinnik Hagrid.

“Nie 'n towenaar nie? Gebeur daar nooit goeters wanneer jy kwaad of bang is nie?”

Harry staar in die vuur. Noudat hy daaroor dink . . . al die snaakse dinge wat sy oom en tante woedend kwaad gemaak het, het gebeur juis wanneer hy, Harry, ontsteld of kwaad was . . . toe Dudley se bende hom gejaag het, was hy skielik op die dak buite hul bereik . . . toe hy so bang was om skool toe te gaan met daardie kort geknipte hare, het dit teruggegroeï . . . en die laaste keer dat Dudley hom geslaan het, het hy wraak geneem sonder dat hy dit eens geweet het. Het hy dan nie die boakonstriktor op Dudley gesit nie?

Harry kyk na Hagrid en glimlag, en sien dat Hagrid behoorlik straal van plesier.

“Sien?” sê Hagrid. “Harry Potter, nie 'n towenaar nie – wag maar, jy sal nog baie beroemd word op Hogwarts.”

Maar oom Vernon is glad nie van plan om oor te gee nie.

“Maar het ek nie gesê hy gaan nie?” sis hy. “Hy gaan na Stonewall Hoër en hy kan sy sterre dank. Ek het daardie briewe gelees en hy't allerhande twak nodig – toorboeke en towerstaffies en . . .”

“As hy wil gaan, sal 'n vet Moggel soos jy hom nie keer nie,” grom Hagrid. “Lily en James Potter se seun keer om Hogwarts toe te gaan? Jy's

lekker mal in jou kop! Sy naam's al op die lys sedert sy geboorte. Hy gaan na die beste skool vir toorkuns en heksery in die hele wêreld. Na sewe jaar sal hy homself nie meer ken nie. Hy sal meng met kinders van sy soort, vir 'n verandering, en hy sal die beste skoolhoof hê wat Hogwarts nog gehad het, Albus Dompeldorius en –"

"EK WEIER OM DIE EEN OF ANDER ONNOSELE OU GEK TE BETAAL OM VIR HOM TOWERKUNSIES TE LEER!" gil oom Vernon.

Dié keer het hy te ver gegaan. Hagrid gryp sy sambreel en tol dit bo sy kop. "MOET NOOIT –" brul hy weergalmend, "– MAAR – NOOIT – VIR – ALBUS – DOMPELDORIUS –VOOR – MY – BELEDIG – NIE!"

Hy swaai die sambreel met 'n swiepende beweging deur die lug sodat dit direk na Dudley wys – daar is 'n pers ligstraal, 'n geluid soos 'n klap- per, 'n skel kreet en die volgende oomblik dans Dudley rond, gillend van pyn en met albei hande oor sy vet boude. Toe hy omdraai, sien Harry die krullerige varkstert wat deur 'n gat in sy broek steek.

Oom Vernon brul. Hy stoot tant Petunia en Dudley tot in die ander kamer, gee een laaste verskrikte kyk na Hagrid en slaan die deur agter hulle toe.

Hagrid staar na sy sambreel en streel sy baard.

"Moes nie my humeur verloor het nie," sê hy meewarig, "maar dit het ook nie reg gewerk nie. Wou van hom 'n vark gemaak het, maar ek sou sê hy's klaar so 'n groot vark, dat daar nie veel oor was om te doen nie."

Van onder sy bossigerige wenkbroue kyk hy sydelings na Harry.

"Moet tog nie iets hiervan by Hogwarts sê nie," sê hy. "Ek mag nie eintlik toor nie. Ek mag so 'n bietjie getoor het om jou te kan volg en die briewe by jou te kry en so aan – dis een van die redes waarom ek dit so graag wou doen."

"Hoekom mag jy nie toor nie?" vra Harry.

"O, wel – ek was ook by Hogwarts, sien, maar ek's – h'm – geskors, om die waarheid te sê. In my derde jaar. Hulle't my towerstaf in twee gebreek en alles. Maar Dompeldorius het my laat aanbly as boswagter. Wonderlike man, Dompeldorius!"

"Hoekom is jy geskors?"

"Luister, dit word laat en ons het mōre baie om te doen," sê Hagrid ferm. "Moet in die winkels kom en al jou boeke en goed koop."

Hy trek sy groot swart jas uit en gooi dit na Harry.

"Jy kan hieronder slaap," sê hy. "Moenie skrik as dit 'n bietjie kriel nie, daar's dalk nog 'n paar waaierstertmuise in een van die sakke."

CHAPTER FIVE



DIAGON ALLEY

Harry woke early the next morning. Although he could tell it was daylight, he kept his eyes shut tight.

“It was a dream,” he told himself firmly. “I dreamed a giant called Hagrid came to tell me I was going to a school for wizards. When I open my eyes I’ll be at home in my cupboard.”

There was suddenly a loud tapping noise.

And there’s Aunt Petunia knocking on the door, Harry thought, his heart sinking. But he still didn’t open his eyes. It had been such a good dream.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

“All right,” Harry mumbled, “I’m getting up.”

He sat up and Hagrid’s heavy coat fell off him. The hut was full of sunlight, the storm was over, Hagrid himself was asleep on the collapsed sofa, and there was an owl rapping its claw on the window, a newspaper held in its beak.

Harry scrambled to his feet, so happy he felt as though a large balloon was swelling inside him. He went straight to the window and jerked it open. The owl swooped in and dropped the newspaper on top of Hagrid, who didn’t wake up. The owl then fluttered onto the floor and began to attack Hagrid’s coat.

“Don’t do that.”

Harry tried to wave the owl out of the way, but it snapped its beak fiercely at him and carried on savaging the coat.

“Hagrid!” said Harry loudly. “There’s an owl —”

“Pay him,” Hagrid grunted into the sofa.

“What?”

“He wants payin’ fer deliverin’ the paper. Look in the pockets.”

Hagrid’s coat seemed to be made of nothing *but* pockets — bunches of keys, slug pellets, balls of string, peppermint humbugs, teabags . . . finally, Harry pulled out a handful of strange-looking coins.

“Give him five Knuts,” said Hagrid sleepily.

“Knuts?”

“The little bronze ones.”

Harry counted out five little bronze coins, and the owl held out his leg so Harry could put the money into a small leather pouch tied to it. Then he flew off through the open window.

Hagrid yawned loudly, sat up, and stretched.

“Best be off, Harry, lots ter do today, gotta get up ter London an’ buy all yer stuff fer school.”

Harry was turning over the wizard coins and looking at them. He had just thought of something that made him feel as though the happy balloon inside him had got a puncture.

“Um — Hagrid?”

“Mm?” said Hagrid, who was pulling on his huge boots.

“I haven’t got any money — and you heard Uncle Vernon last night . . . he won’t pay for me to go and learn magic.”

“Don’t worry about that,” said Hagrid, standing up and scratching his head. “D’yeh think yer parents didn’t leave yeh anything?”

“But if their house was destroyed —”

“They didn’ keep their gold in the house, boy! Nah, first stop fer us

is Gringotts. Wizards' bank. Have a sausage, they're not bad cold — an' I wouldn't say no to a bit o' yer birthday cake, neither."

"Wizards have *banks*?"

"Just the one. Gringotts. Run by goblins."

Harry dropped the bit of sausage he was holding.

"*Goblins*?"

"Yeah — so yeh'd be mad to try an' rob it, I'll tell yeh that. Never mess with goblins, Harry. Gringotts is the safest place in the world for anything yeh want to keep safe — except maybe Hogwarts. As a matter o' fact, I gotta visit Gringotts anyway. For Dumbledore. Hogwarts business." Hagrid drew himself up proudly. "He usually gets me to do important stuff for him. Fetchin' you — gettin' things from Gringotts — knows he can trust me, see.

"Got everythin'? Come on, then."

Harry followed Hagrid out onto the rock. The sky was quite clear now and the sea gleamed in the sunlight. The boat Uncle Vernon had hired was still there, with a lot of water in the bottom after the storm.

"How did you get here?" Harry asked, looking around for another boat.

"Flew," said Hagrid.

"*Flew*?"

"Yeah — but we'll go back in this. Not supposed to use magic now I've got yeh."

They settled down in the boat, Harry still staring at Hagrid, trying to imagine him flying.

"Seems a shame to row, though," said Hagrid, giving Harry another of his sideways looks. "If I was to — er — speed things up

a bit, would yeh mind not mentionin' it at Hogwarts?"

"Of course not," said Harry, eager to see more magic. Hagrid pulled out the pink umbrella again, tapped it twice on the side of the boat, and they sped off toward land.

"Why would you be mad to try and rob Gringotts?" Harry asked.

"Spells — enchantments," said Hagrid, unfolding his newspaper as he spoke. "They say there's dragons guardin' the high-security vaults. And then yeh gotta find yer way — Gringotts is hundreds of miles under London, see. Deep under the Underground. Yeh'd die of hunger tryin' ter get out, even if yeh did manage ter get yer hands on summat."

Harry sat and thought about this while Hagrid read his newspaper, the *Daily Prophet*. Harry had learned from Uncle Vernon that people liked to be left alone while they did this, but it was very difficult, he'd never had so many questions in his life.

"Ministry o' Magic messin' things up as usual," Hagrid muttered, turning the page.

"There's a Ministry of Magic?" Harry asked, before he could stop himself.

"Course," said Hagrid. "They wanted Dumbledore fer Minister, o' course, but he'd never leave Hogwarts, so old Cornelius Fudge got the job. Bungler if ever there was one. So he pelts Dumbledore with owls every morning, askin' fer advice."

"But what does a Ministry of Magic *do*?"

"Well, their main job is to keep it from the Muggles that there's still witches an' wizards up an' down the country."

"Why?"

“*Why?* Blimey, Harry, everyone’d be wantin’ magic solutions to their problems. Nah, we’re best left alone.”

At this moment the boat bumped gently into the harbor wall. Hagrid folded up his newspaper, and they clambered up the stone steps onto the street.

Passersby stared a lot at Hagrid as they walked through the little town to the station. Harry couldn’t blame them. Not only was Hagrid twice as tall as anyone else, he kept pointing at perfectly ordinary things like parking meters and saying loudly, “See that, Harry? Things these Muggles dream up, eh?”

“Hagrid,” said Harry, panting a bit as he ran to keep up, “did you say there are *dragons* at Gringotts?”

“Well, so they say,” said Hagrid. “Crikey, I’d like a dragon.”

“You’d *like* one?”

“Wanted one ever since I was a kid — here we go.”

They had reached the station. There was a train to London in five minutes’ time. Hagrid, who didn’t understand “Muggle money,” as he called it, gave the bills to Harry so he could buy their tickets.

People stared more than ever on the train. Hagrid took up two seats and sat knitting what looked like a canary-yellow circus tent.

“Still got yer letter, Harry?” he asked as he counted stitches.

Harry took the parchment envelope out of his pocket.

“Good,” said Hagrid. “There’s a list there of everything yeh need.”

Harry unfolded a second piece of paper he hadn’t noticed the night before, and read:

HOGWARTS SCHOOL
of WITCHCRAFT *and* WIZARDRY

UNIFORM

First-year students will require:

1. Three sets of plain work robes (black)
2. One plain pointed hat (black) for day wear
3. One pair of protective gloves (dragon hide or similar)
4. One winter cloak (black, silver fastenings)

Please note that all pupils' clothes should carry name tags

COURSE BOOKS

All students should have a copy of each of the following:

The Standard Book of Spells (Grade 1) by Miranda Goshawk

A History of Magic by Bathilda Bagshot

Magical Theory by Adalbert Waffling

A Beginners' Guide to Transfiguration by Emeric Switch

One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi by Phyllida Spore

Magical Draughts and Potions by Arsenius Jigger

Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them by Newt Scamander

The Dark Forces: A Guide to Self-Protection by Quentin Trimble

OTHER EQUIPMENT

1 wand

1 cauldron (pewter, standard size 2)

1 set glass or crystal phials

1 telescope

1 set brass scales

Students may also bring an owl OR a cat OR a toad

PARENTS ARE REMINDED THAT FIRST YEARS ARE NOT
ALLOWED THEIR OWN BROOMSTICKS

“Can we buy all this in London?” Harry wondered aloud.

“If yeh know where to go,” said Hagrid.

Harry had never been to London before. Although Hagrid seemed to know where he was going, he was obviously not used to getting there in an ordinary way. He got stuck in the ticket barrier on the Underground, and complained loudly that the seats were too small and the trains too slow.

“I don’t know how the Muggles manage without magic,” he said as they climbed a broken-down escalator that led up to a bustling road lined with shops.

Hagrid was so huge that he parted the crowd easily; all Harry had to do was keep close behind him. They passed book shops and music stores, hamburger restaurants and cinemas, but nowhere that looked as if it could sell you a magic wand. This was just an ordinary street full of ordinary people. Could there really be piles of wizard gold buried miles beneath them? Were there really shops that sold spell books and broomsticks? Might this not all be some huge joke that the Dursleys had cooked up? If Harry hadn’t known that the Dursleys had no sense of humor, he might have thought so; yet somehow, even though everything Hagrid had told him so far was unbelievable,

Harry couldn't help trusting him.

"This is it," said Hagrid, coming to a halt, "the Leaky Cauldron. It's a famous place."

It was a tiny, grubby-looking pub. If Hagrid hadn't pointed it out, Harry wouldn't have noticed it was there. The people hurrying by didn't glance at it. Their eyes slid from the big book shop on one side to the record shop on the other as if they couldn't see the Leaky Cauldron at all. In fact, Harry had the most peculiar feeling that only he and Hagrid could see it. Before he could mention this, Hagrid had steered him inside.

For a famous place, it was very dark and shabby. A few old women were sitting in a corner, drinking tiny glasses of sherry. One of them was smoking a long pipe. A little man in a top hat was talking to the old bartender, who was quite bald and looked like a toothless walnut. The low buzz of chatter stopped when they walked in. Everyone seemed to know Hagrid; they waved and smiled at him, and the bartender reached for a glass, saying, "The usual, Hagrid?"

"Can't, Tom, I'm on Hogwarts business," said Hagrid, clapping his great hand on Harry's shoulder and making Harry's knees buckle.

"Good Lord," said the bartender, peering at Harry, "is this — can this be — ?"

The Leaky Cauldron had suddenly gone completely still and silent.

"Bless my soul," whispered the old bartender, "Harry Potter . . . what an honor."

He hurried out from behind the bar, rushed toward Harry and seized his hand, tears in his eyes.

"Welcome back, Mr. Potter, welcome back."

Harry didn't know what to say. Everyone was looking at him. The old woman with the pipe was puffing on it without realizing it had gone out. Hagrid was beaming.

Then there was a great scraping of chairs and the next moment, Harry found himself shaking hands with everyone in the Leaky Cauldron.

"Doris Crockford, Mr. Potter, can't believe I'm meeting you at last."

"So proud, Mr. Potter, I'm just so proud."

"Always wanted to shake your hand — I'm all of a flutter."

"Delighted, Mr. Potter, just can't tell you, Diggle's the name, Dedalus Diggle."

"I've seen you before!" said Harry, as Dedalus Diggle's top hat fell off in his excitement. "You bowed to me once in a shop."

"He remembers!" cried Dedalus Diggle, looking around at everyone. "Did you hear that? He remembers me!"

Harry shook hands again and again — Doris Crockford kept coming back for more.

A pale young man made his way forward, very nervously. One of his eyes was twitching.

"Professor Quirrell!" said Hagrid. "Harry, Professor Quirrell will be one of your teachers at Hogwarts."

"P-P-Potter," stammered Professor Quirrell, grasping Harry's hand, "c-can't t-tell you how p-leased I am to meet you."

"What sort of magic do you teach, Professor Quirrell?"

"D-Defense Against the D-D-Dark Arts," muttered Professor Quirrell, as though he'd rather not think about it. "N-not that you n-

need it, eh, P-P-Potter?” He laughed nervously. “You’ll be g-getting all your equipment, I suppose? I’ve g-got to p-pick up a new b-book on vampires, m-myself.” He looked terrified at the very thought.

But the others wouldn’t let Professor Quirrell keep Harry to himself. It took almost ten minutes to get away from them all. At last, Hagrid managed to make himself heard over the babble.

“Must get on — lots ter buy. Come on, Harry.”

Doris Crockford shook Harry’s hand one last time, and Hagrid led them through the bar and out into a small, walled courtyard, where there was nothing but a trash can and a few weeds.

Hagrid grinned at Harry.

“Told yeh, didn’t I? Told yeh you was famous. Even Professor Quirrell was tremblin’ ter meet yeh — mind you, he’s usually tremblin’.”

“Is he always that nervous?”

“Oh, yeah. Poor bloke. Brilliant mind. He was fine while he was studyin’ outta books but then he took a year off ter get some first-hand experience. . . . They say he met vampires in the Black Forest, and there was a nasty bit o’ trouble with a hag — never been the same since. Scared of the students, scared of his own subject — now, where’s me umbrella?”

Vampires? Hags? Harry’s head was swimming. Hagrid, meanwhile, was counting bricks in the wall above the trash can.

“Three up . . . two across . . .” he muttered. “Right, stand back, Harry.”

He tapped the wall three times with the point of his umbrella.

The brick he had touched quivered — it wriggled — in the middle,

a small hole appeared — it grew wider and wider — a second later they were facing an archway large enough even for Hagrid, an archway onto a cobbled street that twisted and turned out of sight.

“Welcome,” said Hagrid, “to Diagon Alley.”

He grinned at Harry’s amazement. They stepped through the archway. Harry looked quickly over his shoulder and saw the archway shrink instantly back into solid wall.

The sun shone brightly on a stack of cauldrons outside the nearest shop. Cauldrons — All Sizes — Copper, Brass, Pewter, Silver — Self-Stirring — Collapsible, said a sign hanging over them.

“Yeah, you’ll be needin’ one,” said Hagrid, “but we gotta get yer money first.”

Harry wished he had about eight more eyes. He turned his head in every direction as they walked up the street, trying to look at everything at once: the shops, the things outside them, the people doing their shopping. A plump woman outside an Apothecary was shaking her head as they passed, saying, “Dragon liver, sixteen Sickles an ounce, they’re mad. . . .”

A low, soft hooting came from a dark shop with a sign saying Eeylops Owl Emporium — Tawny, Screech, Barn, Brown, and Snowy. Several boys of about Harry’s age had their noses pressed against a window with broomsticks in it. “Look,” Harry heard one of them say, “the new Nimbus Two Thousand — fastest ever —” There were shops selling robes, shops selling telescopes and strange silver instruments Harry had never seen before, windows stacked with barrels of bat spleens and eels’ eyes, tottering piles of spell books, quills, and rolls of parchment, potion bottles, globes of the moon. . . .

“Gringotts,” said Hagrid.

They had reached a snowy white building that towered over the other little shops. Standing beside its burnished bronze doors, wearing a uniform of scarlet and gold, was —

“Yeah, that’s a goblin,” said Hagrid quietly as they walked up the white stone steps toward him. The goblin was about a head shorter than Harry. He had a swarthy, clever face, a pointed beard and, Harry noticed, very long fingers and feet. He bowed as they walked inside. Now they were facing a second pair of doors, silver this time, with words engraved upon them:

*Enter, stranger, but take heed
Of what awaits the sin of greed,
For those who take, but do not earn,
Must pay most dearly in their turn.
So if you seek beneath our floors
A treasure that was never yours,
Thief, you have been warned, beware
Of finding more than treasure there.*

“Like I said, yeh’d be mad ter try an’ rob it,” said Hagrid.

A pair of goblins bowed them through the silver doors and they were in a vast marble hall. About a hundred more goblins were sitting on high stools behind a long counter, scribbling in large ledgers, weighing coins in brass scales, examining precious stones through eyeglasses. There were too many doors to count leading off the hall, and yet more goblins were showing people in and out of these. Hagrid and Harry made for the counter.

“Morning,” said Hagrid to a free goblin. “We’ve come ter take some money outta Mr. Harry Potter’s safe.”

“You have his key, sir?”

“Got it here somewhere,” said Hagrid, and he started emptying his pockets onto the counter, scattering a handful of moldy dog biscuits over the goblin’s book of numbers. The goblin wrinkled his nose. Harry watched the goblin on their right weighing a pile of rubies as big as glowing coals.

“Got it,” said Hagrid at last, holding up a tiny golden key.

The goblin looked at it closely.

“That seems to be in order.”

“An’ I’ve also got a letter here from Professor Dumbledore,” said Hagrid importantly, throwing out his chest. “It’s about the You-Know-What in vault seven hundred and thirteen.”

The goblin read the letter carefully.

“Very well,” he said, handing it back to Hagrid, “I will have someone take you down to both vaults. Griphook!”

Griphook was yet another goblin. Once Hagrid had crammed all the dog biscuits back inside his pockets, he and Harry followed Griphook toward one of the doors leading off the hall.

“What’s the You-Know-What in vault seven hundred and thirteen?” Harry asked.

“Can’t tell yeh that,” said Hagrid mysteriously. “Very secret. Hogwarts business. Dumbledore’s trusted me. More’n my job’s worth ter tell yeh that.”

Griphook held the door open for them. Harry, who had expected more marble, was surprised. They were in a narrow stone

passageway lit with flaming torches. It sloped steeply downward and there were little railway tracks on the floor. Griphook whistled and a small cart came hurtling up the tracks toward them. They climbed in — Hagrid with some difficulty — and were off.

At first they just hurtled through a maze of twisting passages. Harry tried to remember, left, right, right, left, middle fork, right, left, but it was impossible. The rattling cart seemed to know its own way, because Griphook wasn't steering.

Harry's eyes stung as the cold air rushed past them, but he kept them wide open. Once, he thought he saw a burst of fire at the end of a passage and twisted around to see if it was a dragon, but too late — they plunged even deeper, passing an underground lake where huge stalactites and stalagmites grew from the ceiling and floor.

"I never know," Harry called to Hagrid over the noise of the cart, "what's the difference between a stalagmite and a stalactite?"

"Stalagmite's got an 'm' in it," said Hagrid. "An' don' ask me questions just now, I think I'm gonna be sick."

He did look very green, and when the cart stopped at last beside a small door in the passage wall, Hagrid got out and had to lean against the wall to stop his knees from trembling.

Griphook unlocked the door. A lot of green smoke came billowing out, and as it cleared, Harry gasped. Inside were mounds of gold coins. Columns of silver. Heaps of little bronze Knuts.

"All yours," smiled Hagrid.

All Harry's — it was incredible. The Dursleys couldn't have known about this or they'd have had it from him faster than blinking. How often had they complained how much Harry cost them to keep?

And all the time there had been a small fortune belonging to him, buried deep under London.

Hagrid helped Harry pile some of it into a bag.

“The gold ones are Galleons,” he explained. “Seventeen silver Sickles to a Galleon and twenty-nine Knuts to a Sickle, it’s easy enough. Right, that should be enough fer a couple o’ terms, we’ll keep the rest safe for yeh.” He turned to Griphook. “Vault seven hundred and thirteen now, please, and can we go more slowly?”

“One speed only,” said Griphook.

They were going even deeper now and gathering speed. The air became colder and colder as they hurtled round tight corners. They went rattling over an underground ravine, and Harry leaned over the side to try to see what was down at the dark bottom, but Hagrid groaned and pulled him back by the scruff of his neck.

Vault seven hundred and thirteen had no keyhole.

“Stand back,” said Griphook importantly. He stroked the door gently with one of his long fingers and it simply melted away.

“If anyone but a Gringotts goblin tried that, they’d be sucked through the door and trapped in there,” said Griphook.

“How often do you check to see if anyone’s inside?” Harry asked.

“About once every ten years,” said Griphook with a rather nasty grin.

Something really extraordinary had to be inside this top security vault, Harry was sure, and he leaned forward eagerly, expecting to see fabulous jewels at the very least — but at first he thought it was empty. Then he noticed a grubby little package wrapped up in brown paper lying on the floor. Hagrid picked it up and tucked it deep inside

his coat. Harry longed to know what it was, but knew better than to ask.

“Come on, back in this infernal cart, and don’t talk to me on the way back, it’s best if I keep me mouth shut,” said Hagrid.

One wild cart ride later they stood blinking in the sunlight outside Gringotts. Harry didn’t know where to run first now that he had a bag full of money. He didn’t have to know how many Galleons there were to a pound to know that he was holding more money than he’d had in his whole life — more money than even Dudley had ever had.

“Might as well get yer uniform,” said Hagrid, nodding toward Madam Malkin’s Robes for All Occasions. “Listen, Harry, would yeh mind if I slipped off fer a pick-me-up in the Leaky Cauldron? I hate them Gringotts carts.” He did still look a bit sick, so Harry entered Madam Malkin’s shop alone, feeling nervous.

Madam Malkin was a squat, smiling witch dressed all in mauve.

“Hogwarts, dear?” she said, when Harry started to speak. “Got the lot here — another young man being fitted up just now, in fact.”

In the back of the shop, a boy with a pale, pointed face was standing on a footstool while a second witch pinned up his long black robes. Madam Malkin stood Harry on a stool next to him, slipped a long robe over his head, and began to pin it to the right length.

“Hello,” said the boy, “Hogwarts, too?”

“Yes,” said Harry.

“My father’s next door buying my books and Mother’s up the street looking at wands,” said the boy. He had a bored, drawling voice. “Then I’m going to drag them off to look at racing brooms. I don’t see why first years can’t have their own. I think I’ll bully Father into

getting me one and I'll smuggle it in somehow."

Harry was strongly reminded of Dudley.

"Have *you* got your own broom?" the boy went on.

"No," said Harry.

"Play Quidditch at all?"

"No," Harry said again, wondering what on earth Quidditch could be.

"I do — Father says it's a crime if I'm not picked to play for my House, and I must say, I agree. Know what House you'll be in yet?"

"No," said Harry, feeling more stupid by the minute.

"Well, no one really knows until they get there, do they, but I know I'll be in Slytherin, all our family have been — imagine being in Hufflepuff, I think I'd leave, wouldn't you?"

"Mmm," said Harry, wishing he could say something a bit more interesting.

"I say, look at that man!" said the boy suddenly, nodding toward the front window. Hagrid was standing there, grinning at Harry and pointing at two large ice creams to show he couldn't come in.

"That's Hagrid," said Harry, pleased to know something the boy didn't. "He works at Hogwarts."

"Oh," said the boy, "I've heard of him. He's a sort of servant, isn't he?"

"He's the gamekeeper," said Harry. He was liking the boy less and less every second.

"Yes, exactly. I heard he's a sort of *savage* — lives in a hut on the school grounds and every now and then he gets drunk, tries to do magic, and ends up setting fire to his bed."

“I think he’s brilliant,” said Harry coldly.

“*Do* you?” said the boy, with a slight sneer. “Why is he with you? Where are your parents?”

“They’re dead,” said Harry shortly. He didn’t feel much like going into the matter with this boy.

“Oh, sorry,” said the other, not sounding sorry at all. “But they were *our* kind, weren’t they?”

“They were a witch and wizard, if that’s what you mean.”

“I really don’t think they should let the other sort in, do you? They’re just not the same, they’ve never been brought up to know our ways. Some of them have never even heard of Hogwarts until they get the letter, imagine. I think they should keep it in the old wizarding families. What’s your surname, anyway?”

But before Harry could answer, Madam Malkin said, “That’s you done, my dear,” and Harry, not sorry for an excuse to stop talking to the boy, hopped down from the footstool.

“Well, I’ll see you at Hogwarts, I suppose,” said the drawling boy.

Harry was rather quiet as he ate the ice cream Hagrid had bought him (chocolate and raspberry with chopped nuts).

“What’s up?” said Hagrid.

“Nothing,” Harry lied. They stopped to buy parchment and quills. Harry cheered up a bit when he found a bottle of ink that changed color as you wrote. When they had left the shop, he said, “Hagrid, what’s Quidditch?”

“Blimey, Harry, I keep forgettin’ how little yeh know — not knowin’ about Quidditch!”

“Don’t make me feel worse,” said Harry. He told Hagrid about the

pale boy in Madam Malkin's.

“— and he said people from Muggle families shouldn't even be allowed in —”

“Yer not *from* a Muggle family. If he'd known who yeh *were* — he's grown up knowin' yer name if his parents are wizardin' folk. You saw what everyone in the Leaky Cauldron was like when they saw yeh. Anyway, what does he know about it, some o' the best I ever saw were the only ones with magic in 'em in a long line o' Muggles — look at yer mum! Look what she had fer a sister!”

“So what *is* Quidditch?”

“It's our sport. Wizard sport. It's like — like soccer in the Muggle world — everyone follows Quidditch — played up in the air on broomsticks and there's four balls — sorta hard ter explain the rules.”

“And what are Slytherin and Hufflepuff?”

“School Houses. There's four. Everyone says Hufflepuff are a lot o' duffers, but —”

“I bet I'm in Hufflepuff,” said Harry gloomily.

“Better Hufflepuff than Slytherin,” said Hagrid darkly. “There's not a single witch or wizard who went bad who wasn't in Slytherin. You-Know-Who was one.”

“Vol-, sorry — You-Know-Who was at Hogwarts?”

“Years an' years ago,” said Hagrid.

They bought Harry's school books in a shop called Flourish and Blotts where the shelves were stacked to the ceiling with books as large as paving stones bound in leather; books the size of postage stamps in covers of silk; books full of peculiar symbols and a few

books with nothing in them at all. Even Dudley, who never read anything, would have been wild to get his hands on some of these. Hagrid almost had to drag Harry away from *Curses and Countercurses (Bewitch Your Friends and Befuddle Your Enemies with the Latest Revenges: Hair Loss, Jelly-Legs, Tongue-Tying and Much, Much More)* by Professor Vindictus Viridian.

“I was trying to find out how to curse Dudley.”

“I’m not sayin’ that’s not a good idea, but yer not ter use magic in the Muggle world except in very special circumstances,” said Hagrid. “An’ anyway, yeh couldn’ work any of them curses yet, yeh’ll need a lot more study before yeh get ter that level.”

Hagrid wouldn’t let Harry buy a solid gold cauldron, either (“It says pewter on yer list”), but they got a nice set of scales for weighing potion ingredients and a collapsible brass telescope. Then they visited the Apothecary, which was fascinating enough to make up for its horrible smell, a mixture of bad eggs and rotted cabbages. Barrels of slimy stuff stood on the floor; jars of herbs, dried roots, and bright powders lined the walls; bundles of feathers, strings of fangs, and snarled claws hung from the ceiling. While Hagrid asked the man behind the counter for a supply of some basic potion ingredients for Harry, Harry himself examined silver unicorn horns at twenty-one Galleons each and minuscule, glittery-black beetle eyes (five Knuts a scoop).

Outside the Apothecary, Hagrid checked Harry’s list again.

“Just yer wand left — oh yeah, an’ I still haven’t got yeh a birthday present.”

Harry felt himself go red.

“You don’t have to —”

“I know I don’t have to. Tell yeh what, I’ll get yer animal. Not a toad, toads went outta fashion years ago, yeh’d be laughed at — an’ I don’ like cats, they make me sneeze. I’ll get yer an owl. All the kids want owls, they’re dead useful, carry yer mail an’ everythin’.”

Twenty minutes later, they left Eeylops Owl Emporium, which had been dark and full of rustling and flickering, jewel-bright eyes. Harry now carried a large cage that held a beautiful snowy owl, fast asleep with her head under her wing. He couldn’t stop stammering his thanks, sounding just like Professor Quirrell.

“Don’ mention it,” said Hagrid gruffly. “Don’ expect you’ve had a lotta presents from them Dursleys. Just Ollivanders left now — only place fer wands, Ollivanders, and yeh gotta have the best wand.”

A magic wand . . . this was what Harry had been really looking forward to.

The last shop was narrow and shabby. Peeling gold letters over the door read Ollivanders: Makers of Fine Wands since 382 B.C. A single wand lay on a faded purple cushion in the dusty window.

A tinkling bell rang somewhere in the depths of the shop as they stepped inside. It was a tiny place, empty except for a single, spindly chair that Hagrid sat on to wait. Harry felt strangely as though he had entered a very strict library; he swallowed a lot of new questions that had just occurred to him and looked instead at the thousands of narrow boxes piled neatly right up to the ceiling. For some reason, the back of his neck prickled. The very dust and silence in here seemed to tingle with some secret magic.

“Good afternoon,” said a soft voice. Harry jumped. Hagrid must

have jumped, too, because there was a loud crunching noise and he got quickly off the spindly chair.

An old man was standing before them, his wide, pale eyes shining like moons through the gloom of the shop.

“Hello,” said Harry awkwardly.

“Ah yes,” said the man. “Yes, yes. I thought I’d be seeing you soon. Harry Potter.” It wasn’t a question. “You have your mother’s eyes. It seems only yesterday she was in here herself, buying her first wand. Ten and a quarter inches long, swishy, made of willow. Nice wand for charm work.”

Mr. Ollivander moved closer to Harry. Harry wished he would blink. Those silvery eyes were a bit creepy.

“Your father, on the other hand, favored a mahogany wand. Eleven inches. Pliable. A little more power and excellent for transfiguration. Well, I say your father favored it — it’s really the wand that chooses the wizard, of course.”

Mr. Ollivander had come so close that he and Harry were almost nose to nose. Harry could see himself reflected in those misty eyes.

“And that’s where . . .”

Mr. Ollivander touched the lightning scar on Harry’s forehead with a long, white finger.

“I’m sorry to say I sold the wand that did it,” he said softly. “Thirteen-and-a-half inches. Yew. Powerful wand, very powerful, and in the wrong hands . . . well, if I’d known what that wand was going out into the world to do. . . .”

He shook his head and then, to Harry’s relief, spotted Hagrid.

“Rubeus! Rubeus Hagrid! How nice to see you again. . . . Oak,

sixteen inches, rather bendy, wasn't it?"

"It was, sir, yes," said Hagrid.

"Good wand, that one. But I suppose they snapped it in half when you got expelled?" said Mr. Ollivander, suddenly stern.

"Er — yes, they did, yes," said Hagrid, shuffling his feet. "I've still got the pieces, though," he added brightly.

"But you don't use them?" said Mr. Ollivander sharply.

"Oh, no, sir," said Hagrid quickly. Harry noticed he gripped his pink umbrella very tightly as he spoke.

"Hmmm," said Mr. Ollivander, giving Hagrid a piercing look. "Well, now — Mr. Potter. Let me see." He pulled a long tape measure with silver markings out of his pocket. "Which is your wand arm?"

"Er — well, I'm right-handed," said Harry.

"Hold out your arm. That's it." He measured Harry from shoulder to finger, then wrist to elbow, shoulder to floor, knee to armpit and round his head. As he measured, he said, "Every Ollivander wand has a core of a powerful magical substance, Mr. Potter. We use unicorn hairs, phoenix tail feathers, and the heartstrings of dragons. No two Ollivander wands are the same, just as no two unicorns, dragons, or phoenixes are quite the same. And of course, you will never get such good results with another wizard's wand."

Harry suddenly realized that the tape measure, which was measuring between his nostrils, was doing this on its own. Mr. Ollivander was flitting around the shelves, taking down boxes.

"That will do," he said, and the tape measure crumpled into a heap on the floor. "Right then, Mr. Potter. Try this one. Beechwood and

dragon heartstring. Nine inches. Nice and flexible. Just take it and give it a wave.”

Harry took the wand and (feeling foolish) waved it around a bit, but Mr. Ollivander snatched it out of his hand almost at once.

“Maple and phoenix feather. Seven inches. Quite whippy. Try —”

Harry tried — but he had hardly raised the wand when it, too, was snatched back by Mr. Ollivander.

“No, no — here, ebony and unicorn hair, eight and a half inches, springy. Go on, go on, try it out.”

Harry tried. And tried. He had no idea what Mr. Ollivander was waiting for. The pile of tried wands was mounting higher and higher on the spindly chair, but the more wands Mr. Ollivander pulled from the shelves, the happier he seemed to become.

“Tricky customer, eh? Not to worry, we’ll find the perfect match here somewhere — I wonder, now — yes, why not — unusual combination — holly and phoenix feather, eleven inches, nice and supple.”

Harry took the wand. He felt a sudden warmth in his fingers. He raised the wand above his head, brought it swishing down through the dusty air and a stream of red and gold sparks shot from the end like a firework, throwing dancing spots of light on to the walls. Hagrid whooped and clapped and Mr. Ollivander cried, “Oh, bravo! Yes, indeed, oh, very good. Well, well, well . . . how curious . . . how very curious . . .”

He put Harry’s wand back into its box and wrapped it in brown paper, still muttering, “Curious . . . curious . . .”

“Sorry,” said Harry, “but what’s curious?”

Mr. Ollivander fixed Harry with his pale stare.

“I remember every wand I’ve ever sold, Mr. Potter. Every single wand. It so happens that the phoenix whose tail feather is in your wand, gave another feather — just one other. It is very curious indeed that you should be destined for this wand when its brother — why, its brother gave you that scar.”

Harry swallowed.

“Yes, thirteen-and-a-half inches. Yew. Curious indeed how these things happen. The wand chooses the wizard, remember. . . . I think we must expect great things from you, Mr. Potter. . . . After all, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named did great things — terrible, yes, but great.”

Harry shivered. He wasn’t sure he liked Mr. Ollivander too much. He paid seven gold Galleons for his wand, and Mr. Ollivander bowed them from his shop.

The late afternoon sun hung low in the sky as Harry and Hagrid made their way back down Diagon Alley, back through the wall, back through the Leaky Cauldron, now empty. Harry didn’t speak at all as they walked down the road; he didn’t even notice how much people were gawking at them on the Underground, laden as they were with all their funny-shaped packages, with the snowy owl asleep in its cage on Harry’s lap. Up another escalator, out into Paddington station; Harry only realized where they were when Hagrid tapped him on the shoulder.

“Got time fer a bite to eat before yer train leaves,” he said.

He bought Harry a hamburger and they sat down on plastic seats to eat them. Harry kept looking around. Everything looked so strange,

somehow.

“You all right, Harry? Yer very quiet,” said Hagrid.

Harry wasn’t sure he could explain. He’d just had the best birthday of his life — and yet — he chewed his hamburger, trying to find the words.

“Everyone thinks I’m special,” he said at last. “All those people in the Leaky Cauldron, Professor Quirrell, Mr. Ollivander . . . but I don’t know anything about magic at all. How can they expect great things? I’m famous and I can’t even remember what I’m famous for. I don’t know what happened when Vol-, sorry — I mean, the night my parents died.”

Hagrid leaned across the table. Behind the wild beard and eyebrows he wore a very kind smile.

“Don’ you worry, Harry. You’ll learn fast enough. Everyone starts at the beginning at Hogwarts, you’ll be just fine. Just be yerself. I know it’s hard. Yeh’ve been singled out, an’ that’s always hard. But yeh’ll have a great time at Hogwarts — I did — still do, ’smatter of fact.”

Hagrid helped Harry on to the train that would take him back to the Dursleys, then handed him an envelope.

“Yer ticket fer Hogwarts,” he said. “First o’ September — King’s Cross — it’s all on yer ticket. Any problems with the Dursleys, send me a letter with yer owl, she’ll know where to find me. . . . See yeh soon, Harry.”

The train pulled out of the station. Harry wanted to watch Hagrid until he was out of sight; he rose in his seat and pressed his nose against the window, but he blinked and Hagrid had gone.

Diagonaalstraat

Vroeg die volgende môre is Harry wakker. Hoewel hy weet dat dit oggend is, hou hy sy oë styf toe.

“Dit was ’n droom,” sê hy kwaai vir homself. “Ek het gedroom dat ’n reus met die naam Hagrid vir my kom sê het ek moet na ’n skool vir toewenaars gaan. Wanneer ek my oë oopmaak, gaan ek terug in my kas wees.”

Daar is skielik ’n harde klop geluid.

En dit is tant Petunia wat aan my deur hamer, dink Harry en sy hart sink. Hy maak nog steeds nie sy oë oop nie. Dit was ’n alte lekker droom. Tok. Tok. Tok.

“Wag,” mompel Harry, “ek staan op.”

Hy kom orent en Hagrid se swaar jas val van hom af. Die hut is vol sonlig, die storm is oor, Hagrid lê vas aan die slaap op die inmekaar gesakte bank en voor die venster is ’n uil wat met sy kloue teen die ruit tik. Daar is ’n koerant in sy snawel.

Harry skarrel uit die bed. Hy is so gelukkig, dit voel of ’n groot ballon binne-in hom opblaas. Hy gaan reguit venster toe en ruk dit oop. Die uil swiep na binne en laat val die koerant bo-op Hagrid, wat nie daarvan wakker word nie. Toe fladder die uil vloer toe en takel Hagrid se jas.

“Moenie dit doen nie.”

Harry probeer die uil verjaag, maar hy klapper sy snawel kwaai in sy rigting en val die jas opnuut aan.

“Hagrid!” sê Harry hard. “Daar’s ’n uil —”

“Betaal hom,” brom Hagrid in die bank.

“Wat?”

“Hy moet betaal word oor hy die koerant afgelewer het. Kyk in die sakke.”

Dit lyk of Hagrid se jas van sakke aanmekaargesit is – bosse sleutels, slakpille, bolle tou, pepermente, teesakkies . . . en toe, eindelijk, haal Harry ’n hand vol vreemde munte uit.

“Gee hom vyf Knoete,” sê Hagrid slaperig.

“Knoete?”

“Die klein koperstukkies.”

Harry tel vyf van die kopermunte af en die uil steek sy been uit sodat hy die geld in ’n leersakkie kan sit. Toe vlieg hy deur die oop venster.

Hagrid gaap steunend, kom orent en rek hom uit.

“Ons beter weg wees, Harry, baie om te doen, moet stad toe gaan en al jou skoolgoed koop.”

Harry draai die towenaargeld om en om en bekyk dit deeglik. Hy het so pas aan iets gedink wat hom laat voel asof die gelukkige ballon binne-in hom skielik ’n gaatjie gekry het.

“H’m – Hagrid?”

“Mm?” sê Hagrid terwyl hy sy reusestewels aansukkel.

“Ek het niks geld nie – en jy’t gehoor wat oom Vernon sê – hy gaan nie betaal sodat ek kan leer om te toor nie.”

“Ag, moenie jou daaroor bekommer nie,” sê Hagrid, terwyl hy opstaan en sy kop krap. “Dink jy jou ma en pa het niks vir jou nagelaat nie?”

“Maar as hul huis verwoes was –”

“Hulle het nie hul goud in die huis gehou nie! Nee, eerste plek om by aan te gaan, is Edelgolt, die towenaarsbank. Kry ’n worsie, hulle is glad nie sleg koud nie – ek sal ook nie nee dankie sê vir ’n stuk verjaardagkoek nie.”

“Towenaars het *banke*?”

“Net die een. Edelgolt. Word deur gnome bestuur.”

Harry laat val die stuk wors wat hy gevat het.

“Gnome?”

“Ja – jy moet dus mal wees om dit te probeer beroof, sê ek jou. Moet nooit ooit met die gnome sukkel nie, Harry. Edelgolt is die veiligste plek in die wêreld vir wat jy ook al wil bewaar – behalwe miskien Hogwarts. Om die waarheid te sê, ek moet self Edelgolt toe gaan vir Dompeldorius. Hogwarts se sake.” Trots strek Hagrid hom tot sy volle lengte uit. “Hy kry my gewoonlik om die belangrike goed vir hom te doen. Vir jou gaan haal – goeters by Edelgolt optel – weet hy kan my vertrou, sien. Nou toe, het jy alles? Kom ons loop.”

Harry volg Hagrid tot buite op die rots. Die lug is nou helder en die see skitter in die sonlig. Die boot wat oom Vernon gehuur het, is nog daar, met baie water in die bodem na die storm.

“Hoe het jy hier gekom?” vra Harry, terwyl hy rondkyk op soek na nog ’n boot.

“Gevlieg,” sê Hagrid.

“Gevlieg?”

“Ja – maar ons gaan sommer hierin terug. Mag nie toorkunsies gebruik noudat ek jou het nie.”

Hulle klim in die boot. Harry staar nog steeds na Hagrid en probeer hom voorstel hoe Hagrid kan vlieg.

“Is ’n jammerte dat ons moet roei,” sê Hagrid en gee Harry nog een van sy skewe kyke. “As ek dinge – h’m – so ’n bietjie aanjaag, sal jy omgee om niks daarvan by Hogwarts te sê nie?”

“Natuurlik nie,” sê Harry wat gretig is om nog towerkunsies te sien. Hagrid haal weer die pienk sambreel uit, tik twee keer teen die kant van die boot en hulle laat vat land toe.

“Hoekom sal dit mal wees om Edulgolt te probeer beroof?” vra Harry.

“Toorkrag – goëlery,” sê Hagrid en vou die koerant oop terwyl hy praat. “Hulle sê daar’s drake wat die hoësekuriteitskluipe bewaak. En dan moet jy jou pad ook nog vind – Edulgolt lê honderde kilometers onder Londen, sien. Diep onder die grond. Jy sal doodgaan van die honger as jy probeer uitkom, selfs al het jy iets gekry.”

Harry sit hieroor en dink terwyl Hagrid die koerant lees, *Die Daaglikse Profeet*. Harry het by oom Vernon geleer dat jy mense moet uitlos wanneer hulle koerant lees, maar dis moeilik, want in sy lewe het hy nog nooit so baie vrae gehad nie.

“Ministerie van Toorkuns maak weer ’n gemors van alles soos gewoonlik,” mompel Hagrid terwyl hy omblaai.

“Daar is ’n Ministerie van Towerkuns?” vra Harry voor hy homself kan keer.

“Tuurlik,” sê Hagrid. “Hulle wou hê Dompeldorius moes minister wees, maar hy sal nooit padgee van Hogwarts af nie, toe kry ou Cornelius Broddelwerk dit. ’n Knoeier soos min. Peper Dompeldorius elke oggend met uile wanneer hy raad wil hê.”

“Maar wat *doen* die Ministerie van Towerkuns?”

“Hul grootste werk is om te keer dat die Moggels uitvind dat daar nog steeds hekse en tovenaars in die wêreld is.”

“Hoekom?”

“Hoekom? Verbrands, Harry, almal sal kitsoplossings vir hul probleme wil hê. Nee, dis beter dat ons uitgelos word.”

Op hierdie oomblik stamp die boot liggies teen die hawemuur. Hagrid vou sy koerant toe en hulle klim teen die kliptrappies op tot in die straat.

Verbygangers staar na Hagrid toe hulle deur die klein dorpie na die stasie stap. Harry kan hulle nie kwalik neem nie. Hagrid is nie net twee keer so lank as enigiemand anders nie, maar hy hou ook aan wys na allerhande doodgewone goed soos parkeermeters en dan sê hy kliphard: “Kyk net daar, Harry, die goed wat die Moggels darem uitdink, h’m?”

“Hagrid,” sê Harry, skoon uitasem van sukkel om by te hou, “het jy gesê daar is *drake* by Edulgolt?”

“Hulle sê so,” sê Hagrid. “Ek sal so wraggies graag ’n draak wil aanhou.”

“Jy wil graag een hê?”

“Wou nog altyd, van ek ’n kind is – hier is ons.”

Hulle is by die stasie. Daar sal binne vyf minute 'n trein Londen toe wees. Hagrid, wat "Moggelgeld", soos hy dit noem, glad nie verstaan nie, gee die note vir Harry sodat hy hul kaartjies kan koop.

Op die trein staan die mense nog meer na hulle. Hagrid neem twee sitplekke op en sit en brei aan iets wat soos 'n kanariegeel sirkustent lyk.

"Het jy nog jou brief, Harry?" vra hy, terwyl hy die steke tel.

Harry haal die perkamentkoevert uit sy sak.

"Goed," sê Hagrid. "Daar's 'n lys van alles wat jy moet hê."

Harry vou 'n tweede stuk papier, wat hy die vorige aand glad nie gesien het nie, oop.

HOGWARTS SKOOL VIR TOWERKUNS EN HEKSERY

Uniform

Eerstejaarstudente benodig die volgende:

1. Drie stelle gewone werksmantels (swart)
2. Een gewone punthoed (swart) vir dagdrag
3. Een paar beskermende handskoene (draakvel of soortgelyk)
4. Een winterjas (swart, silwer knope)

Maak asseblief seker dat alle kledingstukke duidelik gemerk is

Voorgeskrewe boeke

Alle studente moet 'n eksemplaar van die volgende werke hê:

Die Standaardhandleiding vir Goëlery (Graad 1) deur Miranda Singvalk
'n Oorsig van Towery deur Bathilda Paljas

Die Teorie van Towerkuns deur Adelbert Gorrelgatus

Die Beginner se Gids tot Transfigurasie deur Emerik Wisselaar

Eenduisend Magiese Paddastoele en Kruie deur Phyllida Sporium

Towermengsels en -drankies deur Arsenius Bibber

Fantasmagoriese Creature en Waar om Hulle te Vind deur Igtio Sourus

Die Donker Magte: 'n Gids tot Selfbeskerming deur Quentin Bewen

Ander toerusting

1 towerstaf

1 heksetel (piouter, standaardgrootte. 2)

1 stel glas- of kristalflessies

1 teleskoop

1 koperweegskaal

Studente mag ook 'n uil OF 'n kat OF 'n padda bring

OUERS WORD DAARAAN HERINNER DAT EERSTEJAARSTUDENTE NIE TOEGELAAT WORD OM HUL EIE BESEM TE BRING NIE

“Kan ons dit alles in Londen koop?” wonder Harry hardop.

“As jy weet waarheen om te gaan,” sê Hagrid.

Harry was nog nooit in Londen nie. Hoewel dit lyk of Hagrid weet waarheen hy op pad is, is dit gou duidelik dat hy nie gewoond is om die normale metodes te gebruik nie. Hy sit vas in die moltrein se kaartjieversperring en hy kla kliphard dat die sitplekke te klein en die treine te stadig is.

“Ek weet nie hoe die Moggels sonder toorkrag klaarkom nie,” sê hy toe hulle uitstap teen ’n roltrap wat nie werk nie en wat hulle na ’n besige straat vol winkels lei.

Hagrid is so groot dat hy die mense maklik uit die pad stoot; al wat Harry moet doen, is om kort op sy hakke te bly. Hulle stap verby musiek- en boekwinkels, hamburgerplekke en bioskope, maar nie een van die plekke lyk na die soort winkel wat towerstawwe aanhou nie. Dis net ’n doodgewone straat vol doodgewone mense.

Kan daar regtig berge towenaarsgoud kilometers onder die stad wees? Is daar regtig winkels wat toorboeke en besems verkoop? Is dit nie bloot ’n yslike poets wat die Dursleys op hom bak nie? As Harry nie geweet het dat die Dursleys glad nie ’n sin vir humor het nie, het hy dit dalk regtig begin dink; maar tog, hoewel alles wat Hagrid hom sover vertel het absoluut ongelooflik klink, kan Harry nie anders as om hom te vertrou nie.

“Hier is ons,” sê Hagrid en gaan staan. Die Kokende Pot. “Dis ’n beroemde plek.”

Dis ’n klein, vuilerige kroeg. As Hagrid dit nie spesifiek uitgewys het nie, sou Harry dit nooit eens raak gesien het nie. Die mense wat verbystap, kyk nie eens daarna nie. Hulle oë glip van die groot boekwinkel aan die een kant, na die platewinkel aan die ander kant asof Die Kokende Pot glad nie bestaan nie. Om die waarheid te sê, Harry het ’n eienaardige gevoel dat net hy en Hagrid dit kan sien. Voor hy dit egter kan sê, stoot Hagrid hom binnetoe.

Vir ’n beroemde plek is dit baie donker en verwaarloos. ’n Paar ou vroue sit in die hoek en drink klein glasies sjerrie. Een van hulle rook ’n lang pyp. ’n Klein mannetjie met ’n keil praat met die ou kroegman, wat heeltemal bles is en soos ’n verrimpelde okkerneut lyk. Die lae gedreun van stenme word stil toe hulle instap. Dit lyk of almal vir Hagrid ken; hulle waai en glimlag vir hom en die kroegman reik na ’n glas en sê, “Die gewone, Hagrid?”

“Kannie, Tom, is op besigheid vir Hogwarts,” sê Hagrid en klap met ’n groot hand op Harry se skouer sodat Harry se knieë knik.

“Grote genade,” sê die kroegman en tuur na Harry, “is dit – kan dit wees – ?”

Skielik is dit doodstil in Die Kokende Pot.

“So by my siel,” fluister die ou kroegman, “Harry Potter . . . wat ’n eer.” Hy kom vinnig agter die toonbank uit en gryp Harry se hand. Trane spring in sy oë.

“Welkom terug, mnr. Potter, welkom terug.”

Harry weet nie wat om te sê nie. Almal kyk na hom. Die ou vrou met die pyp trek daaraan sonder om te besef dat dit dood is. Hagrid straal.

Toe is daar ’n geskuifel van stoele en die volgende oomblik skud Harry hand met almal in Die Kokende Pot.

“Doris Crockford, mnr. Potter, kan nie glo dat ek u uiteindelik ontmoet nie.”

“So trots, mnr. Potter, so trots op jou.”

“Wou nog altyd jou hand skud – het skoon die bewerasie.”

“Aangenaam, mnr. Potter, ’n voorreg. Diggel is die naam, Dedalus Diggel.”

“Ek het jou al tevore gesien!” sê Harry toe Dedalus Diggel se keil van opgewondenheid bo van sy kop af val. “Jy’t vir my in ’n winkel gebuig.”

“Hy onthou!” kreet Dedalus Diggel dit uit en staar na almal om hom, “het julle gehoor? Hy onthou my!”

Harry skud die een hand na die ander – Doris Crockford hou aan terugkom vir nog.

’n Bleek jong man druk deur tot voor, baie senuagtig. Een van sy oë het trekkings.

“Professor Quirrell!” sê Hagrid. “Harry, professor Quirrell is een van jou onderwysers by Hogwarts.”

“P-P-Potter,” stamel professor Quirrell en gryp Harry se hand, “ek is so in my skik om jou te ontmoet.”

“Watter soort towervak gee u, professor Quirrell?”

“V-Verdediging teen die D-D-Donker Kunste,” stotter professor Quirrell, asof hy liewer nie daaraan wil dink nie. “N-Nie dat jy dit n-nodig het nie, h’m, P-P-Potter?” Hy lag senuagtig. “Jy gaan nou seker al jou toerusting koop, of hoe? Ek m-moet self ’n nuwe b-boek oor vampiere o-optel.” Hy lyk skoon verskrik by die gedagte.

Die ander laat professor Quirrell nie toe om Harry te lank besig te hou nie. Dit vat ’n goeie tien minute voor hy kan wegkom. Uiteindelik slaag Hagrid daarin om homself hoorbaar te maak bo die gebrabbel.

“Moet gaan – baie om te koop. Kom, Harry.”

Doris Crockford skud Harry se hand nog een laaste keer, toe lei Hagrid hom deur die kroeg na ’n klein ommuurde binnehof waar net ’n vullisblik en ’n bietjie onkruid staan.

Hagrid grinnik vir Harry.

“Het jou mos gesê, het ek nie? Het gesê jy’s beroemd. Selfs professor Quirrell het gebewe toe hy jou ontmoet – maar ek moet sê, hy bewee gewoonlik.”

“Is hy altyd so senuagtig?”

“O, ja. Arme drommel. Brilljante brein. Hy was heel oukei toe hy nog uit boeke geleer het, maar toe’t hy ’n jaar afgevat om eerstehandse ervaring op te doen . . . Hulle sê hy’t vampiere in die Swartwoud raakgeloop en hy’t glo ’n lelike stel met ’n heks afgetrap – was nooit weer dieselfde nie. Bang vir die studente, bang vir sy eie vak – nou, waar’s my sambreel?”

Vampiere? Hekse? Harry se kop draai. Hagrid is besig om die bakstene in die muur bo die vullisblik te tel.

“Drie op . . . twee dwars . . .” mompel hy. “Reg, staan terug, Harry.”

Hy tik die muur drie keer met die punt van sy sambreel.

Die baksteen waarteen hy getik het, bewe – dit wriemel – in die middel verskyn ’n klein gaatjie, wat groter en groter word en ’n oomblik later kyk hulle deur ’n yslike gewelfde poort, wat so groot is dat selfs Hagrid daardeur kan stap, na ’n straat. Dis geplavei met keisteentjies en dit kronkel en draai buite sig.

“Welkom,” sê Hagrid, “by Diagonaalstraat.”

Hy grinnik toe hy Harry se verbaasde gesig sien. Hulle stap deur die poort. Harry kyk blitsig oor sy skouer en sien hoe die poort terugkrimp tot soliede muur.

Die son skitter op ’n stapel hekseketels net buite die naaste winkel. Hekseketels – *Alle groottes – Koper, Brons, Piouter, Silwer – Selfroer – Opvoubaar* sê ’n bord wat bo hulle hang.

“Ja, jy’t een nodig,” sê Hagrid, “maar ons moet eers jou geld kry.”

Harry wens hy het ten minste nog agt oë. Hy draai sy kop heen en weer soos hulle in die straat af stap en probeer na alles tegelykertyd kyk: die winkels, die goed op straat, die mense wat inkopies doen. Net buite die apteek staan ’n gesette vrou kopskuddend en mompel, “Drakelewer, sewentien Sekels per ons, hulle moet mal wees . . .”

’n Gedempte hoe-hoe kom uit ’n donker winkel met ’n uithangbord waarop staan *Uiylops Uil Emporium – Bruin-, Steen-, Nonnetjies- en Sneeu-*. ’n Paar seuns, omtrent so oud soos Harry, staan met hul neuse teen ’n venster vol besems. “Kyk,” hoor Harry die een sê, “die nuwe Nimbus Tweeduisend – vinnigste wat daar is –” Daar is winkels wat mantels verkoop, winkels wat teleskope verkoop en vreemde silwer instrumente wat Harry nog nooit tevore gesien het nie, vensters vol vaatjies met vlermuismilt en palingoë, bewerige stapels towerboeke, veerpenne en rolle perkament, bottels vir towerdrankies, ronde mane . . .

“Edelgolt,” sê Hagrid.

Hulle het ’n sneeuwit gebou bereik wat hoog bo die winkels uittoon. Reg langs die gepoetste bronsdeure, in ’n uniform van skarlaken en goud, staan . . .

“Jip, dis ’n gnoom,” sê Hagrid onderlangs terwyl hulle met die wit

trappe opstap. Die gnoom is ongeveer 'n kop korter as Harry. Hy het 'n slim blas gesiggie en 'n bokbaard. Harry let op dat hy baie lang vingers en voete het. Hy buig toe hulle instap. Nou staan hulle reg voor 'n tweede stel deure, hierdie keer van silwer, met die volgende woorde daarop gegraveer:

*Welkom, vreemdeling, aan ons haard;
Gedenk die lot van die gierigaard,
Want die wat neem wat hul nie verdien het,
Sal 'n hoë prys daarvoor betaal.
As jy skatte wil kom haal,
Skatte wat nie joune is,
Dief, onthou hierdie waarskuwing,
Jou daad sal droefheid oor jou bring.*

“Ek sê weer, jy moet mal wees as jy hulle wil beroof,” sê Hagrid.

Twee gnome lei hulle al buigend deur die silwer deure tot in 'n enorme marmersaal. Op hoë stoeltjies agter 'n lang toonbank sit bykans 'n honderd gnome. Hulle skryf in grootboeke, weeg munte op koperskale en bestudeer edelstene deur oogglase. Uit die saal loop meer deure as wat 'n mens kan tel en die hele tyd kom gnome in en uit met nog kliënte. Hagrid en Harry stap na die toonbank.

“Goeiemôre,” sê Hagrid aan een van die gnome. “Ons kom trek geld uit mnr. Harry Potter se kluis.”

“Het u sy sleutel, meneer?”

“Het dit hier iewers,” sê Hagrid en hy begin sy sakke op die toonbank leegmaak. 'n Hand vol muwwerige hondebeskuitjies rol oor die gnoom se boek vol syfers. Die gnoom trek sy neus op 'n plooi. Harry kyk hoe die gnoom aan hul regterkant 'n hopie robyne weeg. Hulle is so groot soos gloeiende kole.

“Hier's dit,” sê Hagrid uiteindelik en hou 'n klein goue sleuteltjie omhoog.

Die gnoom bekyk dit deeglik.

“Dit lyk in orde.”

“Ek het ook 'n brief hier van professor Dompeldorius,” sê Hagrid gewigtig en stoot sy bors uit. “Dis oor die Jy-Weet-Wat in kluis sewehonderd-en-dertien.”

Die gnoom lees die brief deeglik.

“Goed dan,” sê hy en gee dit terug aan Hagrid. “Ek sal iemand kry om julle na albei kluse te neem. Greephaak!”

Greephaak is ook 'n gnoom. Nadat Hagrid die hondebeskuitjies terug in sy sakke geprop het, volg hy en Harry vir Greephaak na een van die deure wat uit die saal lei.

“Wat is die Jy-Weet-Wat in kluis sewehonderd-en-dertien?” vra Harry.

“Mag nie sê nie,” sê Hagrid geheimsinnig. “Hoogs geheim. Hogwarts se besigheid. Dompeldorius vertrou my. Sal my werk verloor as ek praat.”

Greephaak hou die deur vir hulle oop en Harry, wat nog meer marmer verwag het, is verras. Hulle is in ’n nou klipgang verlig deur vlamme fakkels. Die gang loop steil na onder en daar is klein treinspore op die grond. Greephaak fluit en ’n karretjie kom nader. Hulle klim in – Hagrid met moeite – en trek weg.

Vir eers jaag hulle bloot deur ’n doolhof van kronkelende gangetjies. Harry probeer die roete onthou, links, regs, regs, links, middelste vurk, regs, links, maar dis onmoontlik. Dis of die ratelende karretjie self die pad ken, want Greephaak stuur nie.

Harry se oë brand van die koue lug, maar hy hou hulle wyd oop. Eenkeer verbeel hy hom hy sien ’n gloed van vlamme aan die einde van ’n gang en hy kyk vinnig agtertoe om te sien of dit ’n draak is, maar dis te laat – hulle sak dieper en dieper, verby ’n ondergrondse meer waar tasmaai stalaktiete en stalagmiete van die dak en van die vloer af groei.

“Ek kan nooit onthou,” gil Harry op Hagrid bo die gerammel van die karretjie, “wat die verskil tussen ’n stalaktiet en ’n stalagmiet is nie!”

“Stalagmiet het ’n ‘m’ in,” sê Hagrid, “en moenie vrae vra nie, ek dink ek gaan naard.”

Hy lyk inderdaad baie groen en toe die karretjie uiteindelik stilhou langs ’n klein deurtjie in die gangmuur, steier Hagrid uit en leun teen die muur tot sy knieë ophou bewe.

Greephaak sluit die deur oop. ’n Walm groen rook warrel uit en toe dit opklaar, snak Harry na asem. Binne-in is hope goue munte. Stapels silwer. Hopies klein brons-Knoete.

“Alles joune,” sê Hagrid en glimlag.

Alles Harry s’n – dit is ongelooflik. Die Dursleys het beslis nie hiervan geweet nie, of hulle sou dit gouer as blits probeer inpalm het. Hoe dikwels het hulle nie gekla oor hoe duur dit is om Harry groot te maak nie? En die hele tyd lê en wag hierdie klein fortuin hier diep onder die stad vir hom.

Hagrid help Harry om van die munte in ’n sak te sit.

“Die goues is Galjoene,” verduidelik hy. “Daar’s sewentien silwer Sekels in ’n Galjoen en nege-en-twintig Knoete in ’n Sekel, dis maklik genoeg. Reg, dis genoeg vir twee kwartale, ons sal die res veilig vir jou bêre.” Hy draai na Greephaak. “Kluis sewehonderd-en-dertien, asseblief, en kan ons dalk ’n bietjie stadiger ry?”

“Daar’s net een spoed,” sê Greephaak.

Nou gaan hulle nog dieper en tel selfs spoed op. Die lug word kouer en kouer hoe vinniger hulle die skerp draaie vat. Hulle ratel oor ’n ondergrondse kloof en Harry leun oor die kant om te sien wat op die don-

ker bodem aangaan, maar Hagrid kreun en pluk hom aan die nek terug. Kluis sewehonderd-en-dertien het nie 'n sleutelgat nie.

“Staan terug,” sê Greephaak belangrik. Hy streel die deur sagkens met een van sy lang vingers en dit smelt net eenvoudig weg.

“As enigiemand anders as 'n Edelgolt-gnoom dit probeer doen, sal hulle dwarsdeur die deur gesuig word en daarbinne gevange bly,” sê Greephaak.

“Hoe dikwels kyk julle of daar iemand in is?” vra Harry.

“So een keer elke tien jaar,” sê Greephaak en hy grynslag.

Iets werklik besonders moet in hierdie hoësekuriteitkluis gehou word, daarvan is Harry seker, en hy leun gretig vooroor in die hoop dat hy op die minste wonderlike juwele sal sien – maar die kluis lyk leeg. Toe sien hy 'n smerige klein pakkie in bruin papier op die vloer. Hagrid tel dit op en steek dit diep in sy jas. Harry brand om te weet wat dit is, maar hy weet hy moet liever nie vra nie.

“Kom, ons moet terugklim in die vervloekste karretjie en moenie op pad met my praat nie, dis beter as ek my mond toehou,” sê Hagrid.

Een wilde rit later staan hulle hul oë en knipper in die sonlig buite Edeldgolt. Harry weet nie waar om te begin noudat hy 'n sak vol geld het nie. Hy hoef nie te weet hoeveel Sekels daar in 'n Galjoen is nie, want hy weet hy hou meer geld vas as wat hy nog ooit in sy lewe gehad het – selfs meer geld as wat Dudley ooit gehad het.

“Kan net sowel jou uniform kry,” sê Hagrid en knik in die rigting van Madame Malkin se Mantels vir alle Geleenthede. “Luister, Harry, sal jy omgee as ek so 'n ou kappie gaan maak daar in Die Kokende Pot? Ek haat daardie Edeldgolt-karretjies.” Hy lyk ietwat olik, dus stap Harry alleen by Madame Malkin se winkel in. Hy is behoorlik op sy senuwees.

Madame Malkin is 'n glimlaggende, gesette heks en is uitgevat in 'n malvapers gewaad.

“Hogwarts, liefie?” sê sy, nog voor Harry kan praat. “Het alles hier – is juis besig om nog 'n jong man uit te rus.”

Aan die agterkant van die winkel staan 'n seun met 'n skerp, bleek gesig op 'n voetstoeltjie, terwyl 'n tweede heks die soom van sy lang, swart kleed korter maak. Madame Malkin laat Harry reg langs die seun op 'n stoeltjie staan, glip 'n kleed oor sy kop en begin om die soom op te steek.

“Hallo,” sê die seun. “Ook Hogwarts toe?”

“Ja,” sê Harry.

“My pa is langsaan besig om my boeke te koop en my ma is in die straat op soek na 'n towerstaf,” sê die seun. Hy het 'n verveelde temerige stem. “Dan gaan ek hulle saamsleep om na die resiesbesems te gaan kyk. Ek weet regtig nie hoekom eerstejaars nie hul eie besems mag hê nie. Ek

gaan my pa boelie tot hy vir my een koop en dan gaan ek dit op een of ander manier insmokkel.”

Hy laat Harry aan Dudley dink.

“Het jy jou eie besem?” gaan die seun voort.

“Nee,” sê Harry.

“Speel jy Kwiddiek?”

“Nee,” sê Harry weer, terwyl hy wonder wat op aarde Kwiddiek is.

“Ek speel – my pa sê dit sal ’n skande wees as ek nie vir my huis se span gekies word nie en ek moet sê, ek stem saam. Weet jy in watter huis jy gaan wees?”

“Nee,” sê Harry. Hy voel al hoe meer onnosel.

“Wel, niemand weet regtig nie, altans, nie voor hulle nie daar is nie, maar ek weet ek gaan in Slibberin wees, my hele familie was daar – dink net hoe aaklig dit in Hoesenproes moet wees, ek dink ek sal my goed vat en loop, en jy?”

“Mmm,” sê Harry en wens hy kan iets interessanter sê.

“Ek sê, kyk daardie man!” sê die seun skielik en knik na die toonvenster. Hagrid staan daar. Hy grinnik vir Harry en beduie na twee groot roomyse om te wys hoekom hy nie kan inkom nie.

“Dis Hagrid,” sê Harry, in sy skik dat hy ’n slaggie iets weet wat vir die ander seun nuus is. “Hy werk by Hogwarts.”

“O,” sê die seun, “ek het van hom gehoor. Hy’s ’n soort bediende, of hoe?”

“Hy’s die boswagter,” sê Harry. Hy hou al hoe minder van die seun.

“Presies. Ek het gehoor hy’s ’n soort *barbaar* – woon in ’n hut op die skoolgrond, word elke nou en dan dronk en probeer toor en steek dan sy bed aan die brand.”

“Ek dink hy is wonderlik,” sê Harry koud.

“So, nè,” sê die seun en lag smalend. “Hoekom is jy saam met hom? Waar is jou ouers?”

“Hulle is dood,” sê Harry kortaf. Hy is glad nie lus om verder met die seun daaroor te praat nie.

“O, jammer,” sê die seun, maar hy klink glad nie jammer nie. “Hulle was van ons soort, nie waar nie?”

“Hulle was ’n heks en ’n towenaar as dit is wat jy bedoel.”

“Ek dink regtig nie hulle behoort die ander soort toe te laat nie, en jy? Hulle is net nie dieselfde nie, hulle ken nie ons gewoontes nie. Party van hulle het nog nooit eens van Hogwarts gehoor nie, totdat hulle die brief kry, verbeel jou. Ek dink net die ou towenaarfamilies moet toegelaat word. Sê my, wat is jou van?”

Voor Harry kan antwoord, sê Madame Malkin, “Jy’s klaar, liefie,” en Harry, wat glad nie spyt is dat hy nie meer met die seun hoef te praat nie, spring van die stoel af.

“So, ek sal jou seker by Hogwarts sien,” sê die seun verveeld.

Harry is stillerig toe hy die roomys eet wat Hagrid vir hom gekoop het (sjokolade en framboos met gekapte neute).

“Wat’s fout?” sê Hagrid.

“Niks,” jok Harry. Hulle gaan iewers in om perkament en veerpenne te koop. Harry voel ’n bietjie beter toe hy ’n bottel ink kry wat van kleur verander soos jy skryf. Toe hulle by die winkel uitstap, sê hy, “Hagrid, wat is Kwiddiek?”

“Vervlaks, Harry, ek hou aan vergeet hoe min jy weet – dat jy sowaar niks van Kwiddiek af weet nie!”

“Moet my nie nog erger laat voel nie,” sê Harry. Hy vertel Hagrid van die seun in Madame Malkin se winkel.

“– en hy sê mense van Moggel-families behoort nie eens toegelaat te word nie en –”

“Jy is nie van ’n Moggel-familie nie. As hy moet weet wie jy is – hy’t grootgeword met jou naam op sy lippe, as sy ouers towenaars is – jy’t gesien hoe reageer hulle daar in Die Kokende Pot. In elk geval, wat weet hy tog; van die bestes wat ek geken het, was die enigstes met toorkrag in ’n lang stamboom van Moggels – vat jou ma! En kyk wat het sy vir ’n suster!”

“So wat is Kwiddiek?”

“Dis ons sport. Towenaarsport. Dis soos – soos sokker in die Moggelwêreld – almal volg dit – word hoog in die lug op besems gespeel en daar’s vier balle – half moeilik om die reëls te verduidelik.”

“En wat is Slibberin en Hoesenproes?”

“Skoolhuise. Daar’s vier. Almal sê Hoesenproes is ’n spul doffies, maar –”

“Ek wed ek is in Hoesenproes,” sê Harry terneergedruk.

“Eerder Hoesenproes as Slibberin,” sê Hagrid grimmig. “Daar’s nie ’n enkele heks of toenaar wat sleg geword het, wat nie in Slibberin was nie. Jy-Weet-Wie was een.”

“Wol – jammer – Jy-Weet-Wie was by Hogwarts?”

“Jare en jare gelede,” sê Hagrid.

Hulle koop Harry se skoolboeke by ’n winkel met die naam Sierskrif en Klatt, waar die rakke tot teen die plafon gestapel is met boeke so groot soos plaveistene en gebind in leer; boeke so klein soos posseëls met omslae van sy; boeke vol eienaardige simbole en ’n paar met hoegenaamd niks in nie. Selfs Dudley, wat nooit iets gelees het nie, se hande sou jeuk om ’n paar van dié boeke te kon hê. Hagrid moet Harry behoorlik wegsleep van Vloeke en Teenvloeke (*Betower jou Vriende en Begogel jou Vyande met die jongste Tegnieke: Haarverlies, Jelliebene, Tongknopery en veel, veel meer*) deur professor Vindictus Viridian.

“Ek probeer uitvind hoe om ’n vloek op Dudley te sit.”

“Ek sê nie dis ’n slegte plan nie, maar jy mag nie jou towerkragte in die Moggel-wêreld gebruik nie, behalwe in baie uitsonderlike gevalle,” sê Hagrid. “Jy kan in elk geval nog nie met daai vloeke werk nie, jy sal nog lank moet leer voor jy op daai vlak is.”

Hagrid wil Harry nie toelaat om ’n hekseketel in soliede goud te koop nie (“daar staan piouter op jou lys”), maar hulle kry ’n baie oulike skaal om die bestanddele vir towerdrankies mee af te meet asook ’n opvoubare bronsteleskoop. Toe gaan hulle na die apteek, wat fassinerend genoeg is om te vergoed vir die aardige reuk wat daar hang, ’n mengsel van vrot eiers en ou kool. Op die vloer staan vaatjies vol slymerige goed, daar is houers vol kruie, gedroogde wortels en helderkleurige poeiers teen die mure, en bondeltjies vere, stringetjies slagande en gekromde kloue hang van die dak. Terwyl Hagrid die man agter die toonbank vra vir ’n voorraad van die basiese bestanddele vir die maak van towerdrankies, bekyk Harry die silwer horings wat van eenhorings af kom, teen een-en-twintig Galjoene stuk, en die minuskule glinsterswart keweroë (vyf Knoete per skeplepel).

Buite die apteek loer Hagrid weer na Harry se lys.

“Nog net die towerstaf – o, ja, ek het nog nie ’n verjaardagsgeskenk vir jou nie.”

Harry voel hoe hy rooi word.

“Jy hoef regtig nie –”

“Ek weet ek hoef nie. Sê jou wat, ek kry vir jou ’n troeteldier. Nie ’n padda nie, paddas is lankal uit die mode, hulle sal vir jou lag – en ek hou nie van katte nie, hulle laat my nies. Ek kry vir jou ’n uil. Al die kinders wil uile hê, hulle’s jollie handig ook, dra jou pos en alles.”

Twintig minute later stap hulle uit by die Uil Emporium, wat donker is en ritsel en vol flikkerende, juweelblink oë is. Harry dra ’n groot hok met ’n pragtige sneeuwit uil daarin. Die uil is vas aan die slaap, haar kop onder haar vlerk. Harry kan nie ophou stameland dankie sê nie. Hy klink nes professor Quirrell.

“Ag, dis niks,” sê Hagrid aangedaan. “Jy’t seker nie baie presente gekry daar by die Dursleys nie. Nog net Ollivanders – die enigste plek vir towerstawwe, en jy moet die heel beste hê.”

’n Towerstaf . . . dis waarna Harry nog die hele tyd uitsien.

Die laaste winkel is smal en verval. Bo die deur, in goue letters wat plek-plek afskilfer, staan Ollivanders: Vervaardigers van Kwaliteit Towerstawwe sedert 382 v.C. ’n Enkele towerstaf lê op ’n verbleikte pers kussing in die stowwerige toonvenster.

Toe hulle instap, lui ’n tinkelende klokkie iewers in die dieptes van die winkel. Dis ’n klein plekkie en leeg, buiten ’n enkele fynerige stoeltjie waarop Hagrid hom neerplak. Harry voel vreemd, asof hy by ’n biblioteek ingestap het waar almal baie kwaai is. Hy sluk ’n klomp van die nuwe

vrae wat by hom opgekom het terug, en kyk eerder na die duisende smal dosies wat tot teen die plafon opgestapel is. Om die een of ander rede kriewel die agterkant van sy nek. Dis of selfs die stof en die stilte in hierdie vreemde plek met iets soos towerkrag tintel.

“Goeiemiddag,” sê ’n sagte stem. Harry wip. Hagrid moet ook gewip het, want daar is ’n harde kraakgeluid toe hy van die fyn stoeltjie af opspring.

Voor hulle staan ’n ou man, sy groot bleek oë skyn soos mane in die skemerdonker vertrek.

“Hallo,” sê Harry ongemaklik.

“O ja,” sê die man. “Ja, ja. Ek het gedink ek sal jou binnekort hier sien, Harry Potter.” Dis nie ’n vraag nie. “Jy het jou ma se oë. Dis soos gister dat sy self hier was om haar eerste towerstaf te koop. Ses-en-twintig sentimeter lank, lekker veerkragtig, gemaak van wilgerhout. Goeie staf vir goëlwerk.”

Meneer Ollivander beweeg nader aan Harry. Harry wens hy wil sy oë knip. Daardie silwer oë is nogal grillerig.

“Jou pa, ja, hy het mahonie verkies. Agt-en-twintig sentimeter. Buigbaar. ’n Bietjie meer krag en uitstekend vir transfigurasies. H’m, ek sê nou wel jou pa het dit verkies – dit is natuurlik die towerstaf wat die toewenaar uitkies.”

Mnr. Ollivander is nou so na aan Harry dat hul neuse amper aan mekaar raak. Harry kan sy eie weerkaatsing in die mistige oë sien.

“En dit is waar . . .”

Met ’n lang wit vinger raak mnr. Ollivander aan die litteken op Harry se voorkop.

“Tot my spyt moet ek erken dat ek die towerstaf wat dit gedoen het, verkoop het” sê hy sag. “Vier-en-dertig sentimeter. Taksishout. Kragtige towerstaf, baie kragtig, en in die verkeerde hande . . . Wel, as ek moes weet wat daardie towerstaf sou doen . . .”

Hy skud sy kop en toe, tot Harry se grootste verligting, sien hy vir Hagrid.

“Rubeus! Rubeus Hagrid! Hoe lekker om jou weer te sien . . . Eik, veertig sentimeter, redelik soepel, dan nie?”

“Dit was ja, meneer,” sê Hagrid.

“Goeie towerstaf, daardie een. Maar ek veronderstel hulle het dit in twee gebreek na jy geskors is?” sê mnr. Ollivander, skielik streng.

“H’m – ja, hulle het, ja,” sê Hagrid en skuifel rond. “Ek het nog die stukke,” sê hy en flikker ietwat op.

“Jy gebruik hulle seker nie?” vra mnr. Ollivander skerp.

“O nee, meneer,” sê Hagrid vinnig. Harry sien hoe sy greep op die pienk sambreel verstyf toe hy die woorde sê.

“H’mmm,” sê mnr. Ollivander en kyk priemend na Hagrid. “So, nou –

mnr. Potter. Laat ek sien." Hy haal 'n lang maatband met silwer syfers uit sy sak. "Watter een is jou towerstafarm?"

"H'm – wel, ek is regs," sê Harry.

"Steek jou arm uit. So ja." Hy meet Harry van die skouer tot aan die punte van sy vingers, en toe weer van die gewrig na die elmboog, skouer tot by die vloer, knie tot onder die arm en om die kop. Soos hy meet, sê hy, "Elke Ollivander-staf het 'n kern bestaande uit kragtige magiese bestanddele, mnr. Potter. Ons gebruik eenhoringhare, feniksstertvere en die hartsnare van drake. Nie twee Ollivander-stawwe is identies nie, net soos geen twee eenhorings, drake of fenikse heeltemal eenders is nie. Uit die aard van die saak sal jy nooit dieselfde resultate kry as jy 'n ander toewenaar se staf gebruik nie."

Harry besef skielik dat die maatband, wat nou die afstand tussen sy neusgate meet, dit heeltemal op sy eie doen. Mnr. Ollivander vroetel tussen die rakke rond en trek 'n paar dosies uit.

"Dis genoeg," sê hy en die maatband rol op en val in 'n hopie op die vloer. "Goed dan, mnr. Potter. Probeer hierdie een. Berkehout en die hart-snare van 'n draak. Drie-en-twintig sentimeter. Lekker buigbaar. Neem dit en swaai dit."

Harry neem die towerstaf (hy voel regtig simpel) en waai dit 'n bietjie rond, maar mnr. Ollivander gryp dit feitlik onmiddellik uit sy hand.

"Esdoring en feniksvere. Agtien sentimeter. Lekker sweepslag. Probeer net –"

Harry probeer – maar hy het die towerstaf nog skaars gelig of dit word ook deur mnr. Ollivander uit sy hand gegryp.

"Nee, nee – hier, ebbehout en eenhoringhare, een-en-twintig sentimeter, elasties. Komaan, komaan, probeer dit."

Harry probeer. En probeer. Hy het nie 'n idee waarna mnr. Ollivander soek nie. Die hoop towerstaffies wat hy al getoets het, word hoër en hoër op die stoeltjie, maar hoe meer towerstawwe mnr. Ollivander van die rakke afhaal, hoe vroliker word die ou.

"Moeilike kliënt, h'm? Moenie moed opgee nie, ons sal die volmaakte staf hier iewers kry – ek wonder – ja, hoekom nie – ongewone kombinasie – steekpalm en feniksvere, mooi soepel."

Harry neem die towerstaf. Dit voel skielik warm tussen sy vingers. Hy lig dit bo sy kop en bring dit swiepend neer deur die stowwerige lug, sodat 'n straal rooi en goue vonke soos vuurwerke uit die punt spat en dansende kolletjies lig teen die mure gooi. Hagrid juig en klap hande en mnr. Ollivander roep uit, "O, bravo! Ja, inderdaad, o, baie goed. Wel, wel, wel . . . hoe vreemd . . . hoe uiters vreemd . . ."

Hy sit Harry se towerstaf terug in die doos en draai dit toe in bruin papier terwyl hy die hele tyd mompel, "Vreemd . . . vreemd . . ."

"Verskoon my," sê Harry, "maar wat is so vreemd?"

Mnr. Ollivander tuur na Harry met sy bleek oë.

“Ek onthou elke towerstaf wat ek nog ooit verkoop het, mnr. Potter. Elke enkele towerstaf. Dit is toevallig so dat die feniks wie se stertveer in jou towerstaf is, nog ’n veer gegee het – net nog een. Dit is inderdaad baie vreemd dat jy bestem is om hierdie towerstaf te kry omdat dit sy broer – ja, sy broer is, wat jou daardie litteken gegee het.”

Harry sluk swaar.

“Ja, vier-en-dertig sentimeter. Taksishout. Vreemd hoe hierdie dinge gebeur. Die towerstaf kies die towenaar, onthou . . . ek dink ons kan groot dinge van jou verwag, mnr. Potter . . . Dit is immers so dat Jy-Weet-Wie grootse dinge gedoen het – verskriklik, ja, maar groots.”

Harry bewe. Hy is nie seker dat hy te veel van mnr. Ollivander hou nie. Hy betaal sewe Galjoene vir sy towerstaf en mnr. Ollivander buig tot hulle uit die winkel is.

Die middagson hang laag in die hemel toe Harry en Hagrid langs Diagonaalstraat terugstap, deur die muur en terug deur Die Kokende Pot wat nou leeg is. Harry praat glad nie terwyl hulle met die pad af stap nie. Hy merk nie eens hoe die mense op die moltrein hulle aangaap nie, gelaai soos hulle is met pakkies in vreemde vorms en fatsoene en met die slapende sneeu-uil op sy skoot. Op met die roltrappe, uit by Paddingtonstasie. Harry besef eers waar hulle is toe Hagrid hom op die skouer tik.

“Het net-net tyd om iets te eet voor jou trein vertrek,” sê hy.

Hy koop vir Harry ’n hamburger en hulle gaan sit op plastiekstoele om dit te eet. Harry kyk om hom rond. Alles lyk skielik bitter vreemd.

“Voel jy sleg, Harry? Jy’s baie stil,” sê Hagrid.

Harry is nie seker dat hy kan verduidelik nie. Hy het so pas die beste verjaardag van sy lewe gehad – en tog – hy eet sy hamburger en soek na die woorde.

“Almal dink ek is iets anders,” sê hy uiteindelik. “Al daardie mense in Die Kokende Pot, professor Quirrell, mnr. Ollivander . . . maar ek weet niks van toordery af nie. Hoe kan hulle groot dinge van my verwag? Ek is beroemd en ek kan nie eens onthou waarvoor ek beroemd is nie. Ek weet nie eens wat gebeur het toe Wol . . . jammer, ek bedoel, die nag toe my ouers dood is nie.”

Hagrid leun oor die tafel. Agter die wilde baard en wenkbroue skuil ’n minsame glimlag.

“Moenie so bekommerd wees nie, Harry. Jy sal vinnig genoeg leer. Almal begin onder by Hogwarts, jy sal oukei wees. Wees net jouself. Ek weet dit is swaar. Jy word uitgesonder, en dis altyd moeilik. Maar jy sal pret hê by Hogwarts – ek het – nog steeds, om die waarheid te sê.”

Hagrid help Harry op die trein wat hom na die Dursleys moet terugneem en druk ’n koevert in sy hand.

“Jou kaartjie vir Hogwarts,” sê hy. “Die eerste September – King’s Cross-stasie – dit staan alles daarop. Enige probleme met die Dursleys, stuur my ’n brief met die uil, sy weet waar om my te kry . . . Sien jou een van die dae, Harry.”

Die trein trek uit die stasie. Harry wil Hagrid agternakyk tot hy hom nie meer kan sien nie. Hy staan op en druk sy neus teen die venster, maar toe hy sy oë knip, is Hagrid weg.

CHAPTER SIX



THE JOURNEY FROM PLATFORM NINE AND THREE-QUARTERS

Harry's last month with the Dursleys wasn't fun. True, Dudley was now so scared of Harry he wouldn't stay in the same room, while Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon didn't shut Harry in his cupboard, force him to do anything, or shout at him — in fact, they didn't speak to him at all. Half terrified, half furious, they acted as though any chair with Harry in it were empty. Although this was an improvement in many ways, it did become a bit depressing after a while.

Harry kept to his room, with his new owl for company. He had decided to call her Hedwig, a name he had found in *A History of Magic*. His school books were very interesting. He lay on his bed reading late into the night, Hedwig swooping in and out of the open window as she pleased. It was lucky that Aunt Petunia didn't come in to vacuum anymore, because Hedwig kept bringing back dead mice. Every night before he went to sleep, Harry ticked off another day on the piece of paper he had pinned to the wall, counting down to September the first.

On the last day of August he thought he'd better speak to his aunt and uncle about getting to King's Cross station the next day, so he went down to the living room where they were watching a quiz show on television. He cleared his throat to let them know he was there, and Dudley screamed and ran from the room.

“Er — Uncle Vernon?”

Uncle Vernon grunted to show he was listening.

“Er — I need to be at King’s Cross tomorrow to — to go to Hogwarts.”

Uncle Vernon grunted again.

“Would it be all right if you gave me a lift?”

Grunt. Harry supposed that meant yes.

“Thank you.”

He was about to go back upstairs when Uncle Vernon actually spoke.

“Funny way to get to a wizards’ school, the train. Magic carpets all got punctures, have they?”

Harry didn’t say anything.

“Where is this school, anyway?”

“I don’t know,” said Harry, realizing this for the first time. He pulled the ticket Hagrid had given him out of his pocket.

“I just take the train from platform nine and three-quarters at eleven o’clock,” he read.

His aunt and uncle stared.

“Platform what?”

“Nine and three-quarters.”

“Don’t talk rubbish,” said Uncle Vernon. “There is no platform nine and three-quarters.”

“It’s on my ticket.”

“Barking,” said Uncle Vernon, “howling mad, the lot of them. You’ll see. You just wait. All right, we’ll take you to King’s Cross. We’re going up to London tomorrow anyway, or I wouldn’t bother.”

“Why are you going to London?” Harry asked, trying to keep things

friendly.

“Taking Dudley to the hospital,” growled Uncle Vernon. “Got to have that ruddy tail removed before he goes to Smeltings.”

Harry woke at five o’clock the next morning and was too excited and nervous to go back to sleep. He got up and pulled on his jeans because he didn’t want to walk into the station in his wizard’s robes — he’d change on the train. He checked his Hogwarts list yet again to make sure he had everything he needed, saw that Hedwig was shut safely in her cage, and then paced the room, waiting for the Dursleys to get up. Two hours later, Harry’s huge, heavy trunk had been loaded into the Dursleys’ car, Aunt Petunia had talked Dudley into sitting next to Harry, and they had set off.

They reached King’s Cross at half past ten. Uncle Vernon dumped Harry’s trunk onto a cart and wheeled it into the station for him. Harry thought this was strangely kind until Uncle Vernon stopped dead, facing the platforms with a nasty grin on his face.

“Well, there you are, boy. Platform nine — platform ten. Your platform should be somewhere in the middle, but they don’t seem to have built it yet, do they?”

He was quite right, of course. There was a big plastic number nine over one platform and a big plastic number ten over the one next to it, and in the middle, nothing at all.

“Have a good term,” said Uncle Vernon with an even nastier smile. He left without another word. Harry turned and saw the Dursleys drive away. All three of them were laughing. Harry’s mouth went rather dry. What on earth was he going to do? He was starting to attract a lot of funny looks, because of Hedwig. He’d have to ask

someone.

He stopped a passing guard, but didn't dare mention platform nine and three-quarters. The guard had never heard of Hogwarts and when Harry couldn't even tell him what part of the country it was in, he started to get annoyed, as though Harry was being stupid on purpose. Getting desperate, Harry asked for the train that left at eleven o'clock, but the guard said there wasn't one. In the end the guard strode away, muttering about time wasters. Harry was now trying hard not to panic. According to the large clock over the arrivals board, he had ten minutes left to get on the train to Hogwarts and he had no idea how to do it; he was stranded in the middle of a station with a trunk he could hardly lift, a pocket full of wizard money, and a large owl.

Hagrid must have forgotten to tell him something you had to do, like tapping the third brick on the left to get into Diagon Alley. He wondered if he should get out his wand and start tapping the ticket inspector's stand between platforms nine and ten.

At that moment a group of people passed just behind him and he caught a few words of what they were saying.

“— packed with Muggles, of course —”

Harry swung round. The speaker was a plump woman who was talking to four boys, all with flaming red hair. Each of them was pushing a trunk like Harry's in front of him — and they had an *owl*.

Heart hammering, Harry pushed his cart after them. They stopped and so did he, just near enough to hear what they were saying.

“Now, what's the platform number?” said the boys' mother.

“Nine and three-quarters!” piped a small girl, also red-headed,

who was holding her hand. “Mum, can’t I go . . .”

“You’re not old enough, Ginny, now be quiet. All right, Percy, you go first.”

What looked like the oldest boy marched toward platforms nine and ten. Harry watched, careful not to blink in case he missed it — but just as the boy reached the dividing barrier between the two platforms, a large crowd of tourists came swarming in front of him and by the time the last backpack had cleared away, the boy had vanished.

“Fred, you next,” the plump woman said.

“I’m not Fred, I’m George,” said the boy. “Honestly, woman, you call yourself our mother? Can’t you *tell* I’m George?”

“Sorry, George, dear.”

“Only joking, I am Fred,” said the boy, and off he went. His twin called after him to hurry up, and he must have done so, because a second later, he had gone — but how had he done it?

Now the third brother was walking briskly toward the barrier — he was almost there — and then, quite suddenly, he wasn’t anywhere. There was nothing else for it.

“Excuse me,” Harry said to the plump woman.

“Hello, dear,” she said. “First time at Hogwarts? Ron’s new, too.”

She pointed at the last and youngest of her sons. He was tall, thin, and gangling, with freckles, big hands and feet, and a long nose.

“Yes,” said Harry. “The thing is — the thing is, I don’t know how to —”

“How to get onto the platform?” she said kindly, and Harry nodded.

“Not to worry,” she said. “All you have to do is walk straight at the barrier between platforms nine and ten. Don’t stop and don’t be scared you’ll crash into it, that’s very important. Best do it at a bit of a run if you’re nervous. Go on, go now before Ron.”

“Er — okay,” said Harry.

He pushed his trolley around and stared at the barrier. It looked very solid.

He started to walk toward it. People jostled him on their way to platforms nine and ten. Harry walked more quickly. He was going to smash right into that barrier and then he’d be in trouble — leaning forward on his cart, he broke into a heavy run — the barrier was coming nearer and nearer — he wouldn’t be able to stop — the cart was out of control — he was a foot away — he closed his eyes ready for the crash —

It didn’t come . . . he kept on running . . . he opened his eyes.

A scarlet steam engine was waiting next to a platform packed with people. A sign overhead said *Hogwarts Express*, eleven o’clock. Harry looked behind him and saw a wrought-iron archway where the barrier had been, with the words *Platform Nine and Three-Quarters* on it. He had done it.

Smoke from the engine drifted over the heads of the chattering crowd, while cats of every color wound here and there between their legs. Owls hooted to one another in a disgruntled sort of way over the babble and the scraping of heavy trunks.

The first few carriages were already packed with students, some hanging out of the window to talk to their families, some fighting over seats. Harry pushed his cart off down the platform in search of an

empty seat. He passed a round-faced boy who was saying, “Gran, I’ve lost my toad again.”

“Oh, *Neville*,” he heard the old woman sigh.

A boy with dreadlocks was surrounded by a small crowd.

“Give us a look, Lee, go on.”

The boy lifted the lid of a box in his arms, and the people around him shrieked and yelled as something inside poked out a long, hairy leg.

Harry pressed on through the crowd until he found an empty compartment near the end of the train. He put Hedwig inside first and then started to shove and heave his trunk toward the train door. He tried to lift it up the steps but could hardly raise one end and twice he dropped it painfully on his foot.

“Want a hand?” It was one of the red-haired twins he’d followed through the barrier.

“Yes, please,” Harry panted.

“Oy, Fred! C’mere and help!”

With the twins’ help, Harry’s trunk was at last tucked away in a corner of the compartment.

“Thanks,” said Harry, pushing his sweaty hair out of his eyes.

“What’s that?” said one of the twins suddenly, pointing at Harry’s lightning scar.

“Blimey,” said the other twin. “Are you — ?”

“He *is*,” said the first twin. “Aren’t you?” he added to Harry.

“What?” said Harry.

“*Harry Potter*,” chorused the twins.

“Oh, him,” said Harry. “I mean, yes, I am.”

The two boys gawked at him, and Harry felt himself turning red. Then, to his relief, a voice came floating in through the train's open door.

"Fred? George? Are you there?"

"Coming, Mum."

With a last look at Harry, the twins hopped off the train.

Harry sat down next to the window where, half hidden, he could watch the red-haired family on the platform and hear what they were saying. Their mother had just taken out her handkerchief.

"Ron, you've got something on your nose."

The youngest boy tried to jerk out of the way, but she grabbed him and began rubbing the end of his nose.

"*Mum* — geroff." He wriggled free.

"Aaah, has ickle Ronnie got somefink on his nosie?" said one of the twins.

"Shut up," said Ron.

"Where's Percy?" said their mother.

"He's coming now."

The oldest boy came striding into sight. He had already changed into his billowing black Hogwarts robes, and Harry noticed a shiny red-and-gold badge on his chest with the letter *P* on it.

"Can't stay long, Mother," he said. "I'm up front, the prefects have got two compartments to themselves —"

"Oh, are you a *prefect*, Percy?" said one of the twins, with an air of great surprise. "You should have said something, we had no idea."

"Hang on, I think I remember him saying something about it," said the other twin. "Once —"

“Or twice —”

“A minute —”

“All summer —”

“Oh, shut up,” said Percy the Prefect.

“How come Percy gets new robes, anyway?” said one of the twins.

“Because he’s a *prefect*,” said their mother fondly. “All right, dear, well, have a good term — send me an owl when you get there.”

She kissed Percy on the cheek and he left. Then she turned to the twins.

“Now, you two — this year, you behave yourselves. If I get one more owl telling me you’ve — you’ve blown up a toilet or —”

“Blown up a toilet? We’ve never blown up a toilet.”

“Great idea though, thanks, Mum.”

“It’s *not funny*. And look after Ron.”

“Don’t worry, ickle Ronniekins is safe with us.”

“Shut up,” said Ron again. He was almost as tall as the twins already and his nose was still pink where his mother had rubbed it.

“Hey, Mum, guess what? Guess who we just met on the train?”

Harry leaned back quickly so they couldn’t see him looking.

“You know that black-haired boy who was near us in the station? Know who he is?”

“Who?”

“*Harry Potter!*”

Harry heard the little girl’s voice.

“Oh, Mum, can I go on the train and see him, Mum, oh please. . . .”

“You’ve already seen him, Ginny, and the poor boy isn’t something

you goggle at in a zoo. Is he really, Fred? How do you know?"

"Asked him. Saw his scar. It's really there — like lightning."

"Poor *dear* — no wonder he was alone, I wondered. He was ever so polite when he asked how to get onto the platform."

"Never mind that, do you think he remembers what You-Know-Who looks like?"

Their mother suddenly became very stern.

"I forbid you to ask him, Fred. No, don't you dare. As though he needs reminding of that on his first day at school."

"All right, keep your hair on."

A whistle sounded.

"Hurry up!" their mother said, and the three boys clambered onto the train. They leaned out of the window for her to kiss them good-bye, and their younger sister began to cry.

"Don't, Ginny, we'll send you loads of owls."

"We'll send you a Hogwarts toilet seat."

"*George!*"

"Only joking, Mum."

The train began to move. Harry saw the boys' mother waving and their sister, half laughing, half crying, running to keep up with the train until it gathered too much speed, then she fell back and waved.

Harry watched the girl and her mother disappear as the train rounded the corner. Houses flashed past the window. Harry felt a great leap of excitement. He didn't know what he was going to — but it had to be better than what he was leaving behind.

The door of the compartment slid open and the youngest redheaded boy came in.

“Anyone sitting there?” he asked, pointing at the seat opposite Harry. “Everywhere else is full.”

Harry shook his head and the boy sat down. He glanced at Harry and then looked quickly out of the window, pretending he hadn’t looked. Harry saw he still had a black mark on his nose.

“Hey, Ron.”

The twins were back.

“Listen, we’re going down the middle of the train — Lee Jordan’s got a giant tarantula down there.”

“Right,” mumbled Ron.

“Harry,” said the other twin, “did we introduce ourselves? Fred and George Weasley. And this is Ron, our brother. See you later, then.”

“Bye,” said Harry and Ron. The twins slid the compartment door shut behind them.

“Are you really Harry Potter?” Ron blurted out.

Harry nodded.

“Oh — well, I thought it might be one of Fred and George’s jokes,” said Ron. “And have you really got — you know . . .”

He pointed at Harry’s forehead.

Harry pulled back his bangs to show the lightning scar. Ron stared.

“So that’s where You-Know-Who — ?”

“Yes,” said Harry, “but I can’t remember it.”

“Nothing?” said Ron eagerly.

“Well — I remember a lot of green light, but nothing else.”

“Wow,” said Ron. He sat and stared at Harry for a few moments, then, as though he had suddenly realized what he was doing, he

looked quickly out of the window again.

“Are all your family wizards?” asked Harry, who found Ron just as interesting as Ron found him.

“Er — yes, I think so,” said Ron. “I think Mum’s got a second cousin who’s an accountant, but we never talk about him.”

“So you must know loads of magic already.”

The Weasleys were clearly one of those old wizarding families the pale boy in Diagon Alley had talked about.

“I heard you went to live with Muggles,” said Ron. “What are they like?”

“Horrible — well, not all of them. My aunt and uncle and cousin are, though. Wish I’d had three wizard brothers.”

“Five,” said Ron. For some reason, he was looking gloomy. “I’m the sixth in our family to go to Hogwarts. You could say I’ve got a lot to live up to. Bill and Charlie have already left — Bill was head boy and Charlie was captain of Quidditch. Now Percy’s a prefect. Fred and George mess around a lot, but they still get really good marks and everyone thinks they’re really funny. Everyone expects me to do as well as the others, but if I do, it’s no big deal, because they did it first. You never get anything new, either, with five brothers. I’ve got Bill’s old robes, Charlie’s old wand, and Percy’s old rat.”

Ron reached inside his jacket and pulled out a fat gray rat, which was asleep.

“His name’s Scabbers and he’s useless, he hardly ever wakes up. Percy got an owl from my dad for being made a prefect, but they couldn’t aff — I mean, I got Scabbers instead.”

Ron’s ears went pink. He seemed to think he’d said too much,

because he went back to staring out of the window.

Harry didn't think there was anything wrong with not being able to afford an owl. After all, he'd never had any money in his life until a month ago, and he told Ron so, all about having to wear Dudley's old clothes and never getting proper birthday presents. This seemed to cheer Ron up.

“... and until Hagrid told me, I didn't know anything about being a wizard or about my parents or Voldemort —”

Ron gasped.

“What?” said Harry.

“*You said You-Know-Who's name!*” said Ron, sounding both shocked and impressed. “I'd have thought you, of all people —”

“I'm not trying to be *brave* or anything, saying the name,” said Harry, “I just never knew you shouldn't. See what I mean? I've got loads to learn. . . . I bet,” he added, voicing for the first time something that had been worrying him a lot lately, “I bet I'm the worst in the class.”

“You won't be. There's loads of people who come from Muggle families and they learn quick enough.”

While they had been talking, the train had carried them out of London. Now they were speeding past fields full of cows and sheep. They were quiet for a time, watching the fields and lanes flick past.

Around half past twelve there was a great clattering outside in the corridor and a smiling, dimpled woman slid back their door and said, “Anything off the cart, dears?”

Harry, who hadn't had any breakfast, leapt to his feet, but Ron's ears went pink again and he muttered that he'd brought sandwiches.

Harry went out into the corridor.

He had never had any money for candy with the Dursleys, and now that he had pockets rattling with gold and silver he was ready to buy as many Mars Bars as he could carry — but the woman didn't have Mars Bars. What she did have were Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans, Drooble's Best Blowing Gum, Chocolate Frogs, Pumpkin Pasties, Cauldron Cakes, Licorice Wands, and a number of other strange things Harry had never seen in his life. Not wanting to miss anything, he got some of everything and paid the woman eleven silver Sickles and seven bronze Knuts.

Ron stared as Harry brought it all back in to the compartment and tipped it onto an empty seat.

"Hungry, are you?"

"Starving," said Harry, taking a large bite out of a pumpkin pasty.

Ron had taken out a lumpy package and unwrapped it. There were four sandwiches inside. He pulled one of them apart and said, "She always forgets I don't like corned beef."

"Swap you for one of these," said Harry, holding up a pasty. "Go on —"

"You don't want this, it's all dry," said Ron. "She hasn't got much time," he added quickly, "you know, with five of us."

"Go on, have a pasty," said Harry, who had never had anything to share before or, indeed, anyone to share it with. It was a nice feeling, sitting there with Ron, eating their way through all Harry's pasties, cakes, and candies (the sandwiches lay forgotten).

"What are these?" Harry asked Ron, holding up a pack of Chocolate Frogs. "They're not *really* frogs, are they?" He was

starting to feel that nothing would surprise him.

“No,” said Ron. “But see what the card is. I’m missing Agrippa.”

“What?”

“Oh, of course, you wouldn’t know — Chocolate Frogs have cards inside them, you know, to collect — famous witches and wizards. I’ve got about five hundred, but I haven’t got Agrippa or Ptolemy.”

Harry unwrapped his Chocolate Frog and picked up the card. It showed a man’s face. He wore half-moon glasses, had a long, crooked nose, and flowing silver hair, beard, and mustache. Underneath the picture was the name Albus Dumbledore.

“So *this* is Dumbledore!” said Harry.

“Don’t tell me you’d never heard of Dumbledore!” said Ron. “Can I have a frog? I might get Agrippa — thanks —”

Harry turned over his card and read:

ALBUS DUMBLEDORE

CURRENTLY HEADMASTER OF HOGWARTS

Considered by many the greatest wizard of modern times, Dumbledore is particularly famous for his defeat of the Dark wizard Grindelwald in 1945, for the discovery of the twelve uses of dragon’s blood, and his work on alchemy with his partner, Nicolas Flamel. Professor Dumbledore enjoys chamber music and tenpin bowling.

Harry turned the card back over and saw, to his astonishment, that Dumbledore’s face had disappeared.

“He’s gone!”

“Well, you can’t expect him to hang around all day,” said Ron. “He’ll be back. No, I’ve got Morgana again and I’ve got about six of her . . . do you want it? You can start collecting.”

Ron’s eyes strayed to the pile of Chocolate Frogs waiting to be unwrapped.

“Help yourself,” said Harry. “But in, you know, the Muggle world, people just stay put in photos.”

“Do they? What, they don’t move at all?” Ron sounded amazed. “*Weird!*”

Harry stared as Dumbledore sidled back into the picture on his card and gave him a small smile. Ron was more interested in eating the frogs than looking at the Famous Witches and Wizards cards, but Harry couldn’t keep his eyes off them. Soon he had not only Dumbledore and Morgana, but Hengist of Woodcroft, Alberic Grunnion, Circe, Paracelsus, and Merlin. He finally tore his eyes away from the druidess Cliodna, who was scratching her nose, to open a bag of Bertie Bott’s Every Flavor Beans.

“You want to be careful with those,” Ron warned Harry. “When they say every flavor, they *mean* every flavor — you know, you get all the ordinary ones like chocolate and peppermint and marmalade, but then you can get spinach and liver and tripe. George reckons he had a booger-flavored one once.”

Ron picked up a green bean, looked at it carefully, and bit into a corner.

“Bleaaargh — see? Sprouts.”

They had a good time eating the Every Flavor Beans. Harry got toast, coconut, baked bean, strawberry, curry, grass, coffee, sardine,

and was even brave enough to nibble the end off a funny gray one Ron wouldn't touch, which turned out to be pepper.

The countryside now flying past the window was becoming wilder. The neat fields had gone. Now there were woods, twisting rivers, and dark green hills.

There was a knock on the door of their compartment and the round-faced boy Harry had passed on platform nine and three-quarters came in. He looked tearful.

"Sorry," he said, "but have you seen a toad at all?"

When they shook their heads, he wailed, "I've lost him! He keeps getting away from me!"

"He'll turn up," said Harry.

"Yes," said the boy miserably. "Well, if you see him . . ."

He left.

"Don't know why he's so bothered," said Ron. "If I'd brought a toad I'd lose it as quick as I could. Mind you, I brought Scabbers, so I can't talk."

The rat was still snoozing on Ron's lap.

"He might have died and you wouldn't know the difference," said Ron in disgust. "I tried to turn him yellow yesterday to make him more interesting, but the spell didn't work. I'll show you, look . . ."

He rummaged around in his trunk and pulled out a very battered-looking wand. It was chipped in places and something white was glinting at the end.

"Unicorn hair's nearly poking out. Anyway —"

He had just raised his wand when the compartment door slid open again. The toadless boy was back, but this time he had a girl with

him. She was already wearing her new Hogwarts robes.

“Has anyone seen a toad? Neville’s lost one,” she said. She had a bossy sort of voice, lots of bushy brown hair, and rather large front teeth.

“We’ve already told him we haven’t seen it,” said Ron, but the girl wasn’t listening, she was looking at the wand in his hand.

“Oh, are you doing magic? Let’s see it, then.”

She sat down. Ron looked taken aback.

“Er — all right.”

He cleared his throat.

*“Sunshine, daisies, butter mellow,
Turn this stupid, fat rat yellow.”*

He waved his wand, but nothing happened. Scabbers stayed gray and fast asleep.

“Are you sure that’s a real spell?” said the girl. “Well, it’s not very good, is it? I’ve tried a few simple spells just for practice and it’s all worked for me. Nobody in my family’s magic at all, it was ever such a surprise when I got my letter, but I was ever so pleased, of course, I mean, it’s the very best school of witchcraft there is, I’ve heard — I’ve learned all our course books by heart, of course, I just hope it will be enough — I’m Hermione Granger, by the way, who are you?”

She said all this very fast.

Harry looked at Ron, and was relieved to see by his stunned face that he hadn’t learned all the course books by heart either.

“I’m Ron Weasley,” Ron muttered.

“Harry Potter,” said Harry.

“Are you really?” said Hermione. “I know all about you, of course — I got a few extra books for background reading, and you’re in *Modern Magical History* and *The Rise and Fall of the Dark Arts* and *Great Wizarding Events of the Twentieth Century*.”

“Am I?” said Harry, feeling dazed.

“Goodness, didn’t you know, I’d have found out everything I could if it was me,” said Hermione. “Do either of you know what House you’ll be in? I’ve been asking around, and I hope I’m in Gryffindor, it sounds by far the best; I hear Dumbledore himself was in it, but I suppose Ravenclaw wouldn’t be too bad. . . . Anyway, we’d better go and look for Neville’s toad. You two had better change, you know, I expect we’ll be there soon.”

And she left, taking the toadless boy with her.

“Whatever House I’m in, I hope she’s not in it,” said Ron. He threw his wand back into his trunk. “Stupid spell — George gave it to me, bet he knew it was a dud.”

“What House are your brothers in?” asked Harry.

“Gryffindor,” said Ron. Gloom seemed to be settling on him again. “Mum and Dad were in it, too. I don’t know what they’ll say if I’m not. I don’t suppose Ravenclaw *would* be too bad, but imagine if they put me in Slytherin.”

“That’s the House Vol-, I mean, You-Know-Who was in?”

“Yeah,” said Ron. He flopped back into his seat, looking depressed.

“You know, I think the ends of Scabbers’ whiskers are a bit lighter,” said Harry, trying to take Ron’s mind off Houses. “So what do your oldest brothers do now that they’ve left, anyway?”

Harry was wondering what a wizard did once he'd finished school.

“Charlie’s in Romania studying dragons, and Bill’s in Africa doing something for Gringotts,” said Ron. “Did you hear about Gringotts? It’s been all over the *Daily Prophet*, but I don’t suppose you get that with the Muggles — someone tried to rob a high security vault.”

Harry stared.

“Really? What happened to them?”

“Nothing, that’s why it’s such big news. They haven’t been caught. My dad says it must’ve been a powerful Dark wizard to get round Gringotts, but they don’t think they took anything, that’s what’s odd. ’Course, everyone gets scared when something like this happens in case You-Know-Who’s behind it.”

Harry turned this news over in his mind. He was starting to get a prickle of fear every time You-Know-Who was mentioned. He supposed this was all part of entering the magical world, but it had been a lot more comfortable saying “Voldemort” without worrying.

“What’s your Quidditch team?” Ron asked.

“Er — I don’t know any,” Harry confessed.

“What!” Ron looked dumbfounded. “Oh, you wait, it’s the best game in the world —” And he was off, explaining all about the four balls and the positions of the seven players, describing famous games he’d been to with his brothers and the broomstick he’d like to get if he had the money. He was just taking Harry through the finer points of the game when the compartment door slid open yet again, but it wasn’t Neville the toadless boy, or Hermione Granger this time.

Three boys entered, and Harry recognized the middle one at once:

It was the pale boy from Madam Malkin's robe shop. He was looking at Harry with a lot more interest than he'd shown back in Diagon Alley.

"Is it true?" he said. "They're saying all down the train that Harry Potter's in this compartment. So it's you, is it?"

"Yes," said Harry. He was looking at the other boys. Both of them were thickset and looked extremely mean. Standing on either side of the pale boy, they looked like bodyguards.

"Oh, this is Crabbe and this is Goyle," said the pale boy carelessly, noticing where Harry was looking. "And my name's Malfoy, Draco Malfoy."

Ron gave a slight cough, which might have been hiding a snigger. Draco Malfoy looked at him.

"Think my name's funny, do you? No need to ask who you are. My father told me all the Weasleys have red hair, freckles, and more children than they can afford."

He turned back to Harry. "You'll soon find out some wizarding families are much better than others, Potter. You don't want to go making friends with the wrong sort. I can help you there."

He held out his hand to shake Harry's, but Harry didn't take it.

"I think I can tell who the wrong sort are for myself, thanks," he said coolly.

Draco Malfoy didn't go red, but a pink tinge appeared in his pale cheeks.

"I'd be careful if I were you, Potter," he said slowly. "Unless you're a bit politer you'll go the same way as your parents. They didn't know what was good for them, either. You hang around with

riffraff like the Weasleys and that Hagrid, and it'll rub off on you."

Both Harry and Ron stood up.

"Say that again," Ron said, his face as red as his hair.

"Oh, you're going to fight us, are you?" Malfoy sneered.

"Unless you get out now," said Harry, more bravely than he felt,

because Crabbe and Goyle were a lot bigger than him or Ron.

"But we don't feel like leaving, do we, boys? We've eaten all our food and you still seem to have some."

Goyle reached toward the Chocolate Frogs next to Ron — Ron leapt forward, but before he'd so much as touched Goyle, Goyle let out a horrible yell.

Scabbers the rat was hanging off his finger, sharp little teeth sunk deep into Goyle's knuckle — Crabbe and Malfoy backed away as Goyle swung Scabbers round and round, howling, and when Scabbers finally flew off and hit the window, all three of them disappeared at once. Perhaps they thought there were more rats lurking among the sweets, or perhaps they'd heard footsteps, because a second later, Hermione Granger had come in.

"What *has* been going on?" she said, looking at the sweets all over the floor and Ron picking up Scabbers by his tail.

"I think he's been knocked out," Ron said to Harry. He looked closer at Scabbers. "No — I don't believe it — he's gone back to sleep."

And so he had.

"You've met Malfoy before?"

Harry explained about their meeting in Diagon Alley.

"I've heard of his family," said Ron darkly. "They were some of

the first to come back to our side after You-Know-Who disappeared. Said they'd been bewitched. My dad doesn't believe it. He says Malfoy's father didn't need an excuse to go over to the Dark Side." He turned to Hermione. "Can we help you with something?"

"You'd better hurry up and put your robes on, I've just been up to the front to ask the conductor, and he says we're nearly there. You haven't been fighting, have you? You'll be in trouble before we even get there!"

"Scabbers has been fighting, not us," said Ron, scowling at her. "Would you mind leaving while we change?"

"All right — I only came in here because people outside are behaving very childishly, racing up and down the corridors," said Hermione in a sniffy voice. "And you've got dirt on your nose, by the way, did you know?"

Ron glared at her as she left. Harry peered out of the window. It was getting dark. He could see mountains and forests under a deep purple sky. The train did seem to be slowing down.

He and Ron took off their jackets and pulled on their long black robes. Ron's were a bit short for him, you could see his sneakers underneath them.

A voice echoed through the train: "We will be reaching Hogwarts in five minutes' time. Please leave your luggage on the train, it will be taken to the school separately."

Harry's stomach lurched with nerves and Ron, he saw, looked pale under his freckles. They crammed their pockets with the last of the sweets and joined the crowd thronging the corridor.

The train slowed right down and finally stopped. People pushed

their way toward the door and out on to a tiny, dark platform. Harry shivered in the cold night air. Then a lamp came bobbing over the heads of the students, and Harry heard a familiar voice: “Firs’ years! Firs’ years over here! All right there, Harry?”

Hagrid’s big hairy face beamed over the sea of heads.

“C’mon, follow me — any more firs’ years? Mind yer step, now! Firs’ years follow me!”

Slipping and stumbling, they followed Hagrid down what seemed to be a steep, narrow path. It was so dark on either side of them that Harry thought there must be thick trees there. Nobody spoke much. Neville, the boy who kept losing his toad, sniffed once or twice.

“Yeh’ll get yer firs’ sight o’ Hogwarts in a sec,” Hagrid called over his shoulder, “jus’ round this bend here.”

There was a loud “Ooooooh!”

The narrow path had opened suddenly onto the edge of a great black lake. Perched atop a high mountain on the other side, its windows sparkling in the starry sky, was a vast castle with many turrets and towers.

“No more’n four to a boat!” Hagrid called, pointing to a fleet of little boats sitting in the water by the shore. Harry and Ron were followed into their boat by Neville and Hermione.

“Everyone in?” shouted Hagrid, who had a boat to himself. “Right then — FORWARD!”

And the fleet of little boats moved off all at once, gliding across the lake, which was as smooth as glass. Everyone was silent, staring up at the great castle overhead. It towered over them as they sailed nearer and nearer to the cliff on which it stood.

“Heads down!” yelled Hagrid as the first boats reached the cliff; they all bent their heads and the little boats carried them through a curtain of ivy that hid a wide opening in the cliff face. They were carried along a dark tunnel, which seemed to be taking them right underneath the castle, until they reached a kind of underground harbor, where they clambered out onto rocks and pebbles.

“Oy, you there! Is this your toad?” said Hagrid, who was checking the boats as people climbed out of them.

“Trevor!” cried Neville blissfully, holding out his hands. Then they clambered up a passageway in the rock after Hagrid’s lamp, coming out at last onto smooth, damp grass right in the shadow of the castle.

They walked up a flight of stone steps and crowded around the huge, oak front door.

“Everyone here? You there, still got yer toad?”

Hagrid raised a gigantic fist and knocked three times on the castle door.

Die Reis vanaf Perron Nommer Nege-en-'n-driekwart

Harry se laaste maand saam met die Dursleys is glad nie pret nie. Dit is wel so dat Dudley nou so bang is vir Harry dat hy nie eens in dieselfde vertrek as Harry wil wees nie, terwyl tant Petunia en oom Vernon hom nie meer in sy kas toesluit of dwing om alles te doen of op hom skree nie – om die waarheid te sê, hulle praat nie met hom nie. Halfbang, halfbriesend, maak hulle of elke stoel waarop Harry sit, leeg is. Hoewel dit in baie opsigte 'n verbetering is, is dit ook na 'n rukkie neerdrukkend.

Harry is meesal in sy kamer met sy nuwe uil as geselskap. Hy noem haar Hedwig, 'n naam wat hy in *Geskiedenis van Towyery* gekry het. Sy skoolboeke is baie interessant. Hy lê en lees op sy bed tot laat in die nag. Hedwig swiep na willekeur in en uit by die oop venster. Dis 'n geluk dat tant Petunia nie meer inkom om te stofsuiig nie, want Hedwig bring gedurig dooie muise kamer toe. Elke aand voor hy gaan slaap, tik Harry nog 'n dag af op die stukkie papier wat hy teen die muur geplak het. So tel hy die dae af tot die eerste September.

Op die laaste dag van Augustus skraap hy moed bymekaar en gaan praat met sy oom en tante oor hoe hy die volgende dag by King's Cross-stasie gaan kom. Hy stap na die sitkamer waar hulle na 'n vasvrapprogram op televisie sit en kyk. Hy maak sy keel skoon sodat hulle kan weet hy is daar en Dudley skree en hardloop uit die kamer.

"H'm – oom Vernon?"

Oom Vernon snork om te wys dat hy luister.

"H'm – ek moet môre by King's Cross wees – om na Hogwarts te gaan."

Oom Vernon snork weer.

"Sal oom my dalk kan neem?"

Snork. Harry neem aan dat dit ja beteken.

Hy's net op pad boontoe om te gaan pak toe oom Vernon uiteindelik praat.

"Snaakse manier om by 'n towenaarskool te kom, die trein. Towertapyt het seker 'n pap wiel, of hoe?"

Harry antwoord nie.

"Waar is dié skool nou eintlik?"

“Ek weet nie,” sê Harry en besef vir die eerste keer dat hy regtig nie weet nie. Hy haal die kaartjie wat Hagrid vir hom gegee het, uit sy sak. “I’k moet die trein môreoggend om elfuur op perron nege-en-’n-driekwart kry,” sê hy.

Sy oom en tante staar.

“Watse perron?”

“Nege-en-’n-driekwart.”

“Moenie twak praat nie,” sê oom Vernon, “daar’s nie iets soos perron nege-en-’n-driekwart nie.”

“Dis wat op die kaartjie staan.”

“Stapelgek,” sê oom Vernon, “van lotjie getik, die hele ou sous. Jy sal sien. Wag net. Goed, goed, ons sal jou King’s Cross toe neem. Ons gaan in elk geval môre Londen toe, anders sou ek nie moeite doen nie.”

“Hoekom gaan julle Londen toe?” vra Harry in ’n poging om dinge op ’n vriendelike noot te hou.

“Neem Dudley hospitaal toe,” grom oom Vernon. “Moet daardie vervloekste stert laat uitsny voor hy Smeltings toe gaan.”

Vyfuur die volgende oggend is Harry wakker en so opgewonde dat hy nie weer kan slaap nie. Hy staan op en trek sy jeans aan, want hy wil nie stasie toe gaan in sy towenaarskleed nie – hy sal dit op die trein aantrek. Hy kyk weer eens of hy alles op die Hogwarts-lys het, maak seker dat Hedwig veilig toe is in haar hok en stap op en neer in die kamer, terwyl hy wag vir die Dursleys om op te staan. Twee uur later is Harry se yslike, swaar trommel agterin die Dursleys se kar, en het tant Petunia vir Dudley omgepraat om langs Harry te sit, en hulle trek weg.

Teen halfelf is hulle by King’s Cross. Oom Vernon laai Harry se trommel op ’n trollie en stoot dit stasie toe. Harry dink nog dis vreemd gaaf, totdat oom Vernon vassteek en met ’n gemene grynsag op sy gesig na die perronne kyk.

“Hier is jy, seun, perron nege – perron tien. Jou perron moet hier iewers tussen die twee wees, maar dit lyk of dit nog nie gebou is nie, of hoe?”

Hy is natuurlik doodreg. Daar is ’n reusagtige plastieknommer nege bo die een perron en ’n reusagtige plastieknommer tien bo die een langsaan, maar tussenin is niks, heeltemal niks.

“Lekker skoolgaan,” sê oom Vernon met ’n selfs meer gemene glimlag. Sonder ’n woord stap hy aan. Harry draai om en sien hoe die Dursleys wegry. Al drie van hulle lag. Harry se mond voel droog. Wat op dees aarde gaan hy doen? Van die mense kyk reeds skeef na hom, oor Hedwig. Hy sal iemand moet vra.

Hy stop ’n wag wat verbystap, maar waag dit nie om te vra waar perron nege-en-’n-driekwart is nie. Die wag het nog nooit van Hogwarts gehoor nie en toe Harry nie eens kon sê in watter deel van die land dit is

nie, begin hy hom vererg, asof Harry hom aspris vir die gek hou. Harry begin desperaat word en vra watter trein om elfuur vertrek, maar die wag sê daar is nie so 'n trein nie. Op die ou end stap die man weg en mōmpel iets oor mense wat sy tyd mors. Harry sukkel om nie paniekerig te word nie. Volgens die groot horlosie bokant die aankomsbord, is daar net tien minute voor die trein na Hogwarts vertrek en hy het steeds nie 'n idee hoe om daarop te kom nie. Hy is gestrand in die middel van 'n stasie met 'n trommel wat hy skaars kan roer, 'n sak vol towenaarsgeld en 'n groot uil.

Hagrid moet vergeet het om hom te vertel wat om te doen, iets soos om die derde baksteen aan die linkerkant te raps soos hulle moes maak om in Diagonaalstraat te kom. Hy wonder of hy sy towerstaffie moet uithaal en teen die versperring tussen perron nege en tien moet tik.

Op daardie oomblik stap 'n groep mense kort agter hom verby en hy vang 'n paar woorde.

“– gepak met Moggels, natuurlik –”

Harry swaai om. Die spreker is 'n plomp vrou met vier seuns, almal met vlamrooi hare. Elkeen van hulle stoot 'n trommel net soos Harry s'n voor hom uit – en een van hulle het 'n uil.

Met 'n hart wat in sy borskas hamer, stoot Harry sy trollie agter hulle aan. Hulle gaan staan en hy ook, net na genoeg sodat hy kan hoor wat hulle sê.

“Wat is die perron se nommer nou weer?” sê die seuns se ma.

“Nege-en-'n-driekwart!” sê 'n klein dogtertjie, ook met rooi hare. Sy hou haar ma se hand vas. “Mammie, hoekom kan ek nie ook . . .”

“Jy's nie oud genoeg nie, Ginny, so hou tog op. Oukei, Percy, gaan jy eerste.”

Die seun wat na die oudste lyk, marsjeer in die rigting van perron nege en tien. Harry hou hom fyn dop, hy maak seker dat hy nie 'n oog knip nie, ingeval hy mis wat gebeur – maar net toe die seun die versperring tussen die twee perronne bereik, swerm 'n groot groep toeriste agter hom verby en teen die tyd dat die laaste rugsak verdwyn het, is die seun ook weg.

“Fred, jou beurt,” sê die vrou.

“Ek's nie Fred nie, ek is George,” sê die seun. “Sowaar, vroumens . . . wat 'n ma! Kan nie eens sien dat ek George is nie!”

“Jammer, George, my skat.”

“Net 'n ou grappie, ek is Fred,” sê die seun en lag en stap weg. Sy tweeling roep agterna dat hy moet opskud en hy het ook, want 'n oomblik later het ook hy verdwyn.

Hoe het hy dit gedoen? wonder Harry.

Nou loop die derde broer ook flink in die rigting van die kaartjiever-sperring – hy is amper daar – en toe, skielik, is hy net mooi nêrens nie.

Daar is geen ander raad nie.

“Verskoon my,” sê Harry vir die plomp vrou.

“Hallo, skat,” sê sy. “Eerste keer by Hogwarts? Ron is ook nuut.”

Sy wys na die laaste en jongste van haar seuns. Hy is lank en skraal en rankerig, met sproete en groot hande en voete en ’n lang neus.

“Ja,” sê Harry. “Dis net – dis net, ek weet nie hoe om –”

“Hoe om op die perron te kom nie?” vra sy vriendelik en Harry knik.

“Maklik,” sê sy. “Al wat jy moet doen, is om reguit na die versperring tussen perron nege en tien te loop. Moenie gaan staan nie en moet ook nie bang wees dat jy daarin gaan vasloop nie, dit is baie belangrik. Gaan gou voor Ron.”

“H’m – goed dan,” sê Harry.

Hy stoot sy trollie voor hom uit en staar na die versperring. Dit lyk besonder solied.

Hy pyl reguit daarop af. Mense wat op pad is na perron nommers nege en tien, stamp teen hom. Harry loop vinniger. Hy weet hy gaan in daardie versperring vasloop en dan gaan hy diep in die sop wees – hy leun oor sy trollie en begin hardloop – die versperring kom nader en nader – hy sal nie kan stop nie – die trollie is buite beheer – hy’s ’n voet weg – hy maak sy oë toe en wag vir die botsing –

Dit kom nie . . . hy hou aan en aan met hardloop . . . hy maak sy oë oop.

’n Rooi stoomtrein staan langs ’n perron wat gepak is met mense. ’n Oorhoofse teken sê *Hogwarts Express, elfuur*. Harry kyk agter hom en sien ’n gewelfde poort van gegote yster waarop die woorde Perron Nege-en-’n-driekwart staan. Hy het dit gemaak.

Die lokomotief se rook warrel oor die koppe van die geselsende skare, terwyl katte van alle kleure teen die mense se bene skuur. Uile hoe-hoe op ’n ontevrede noot vir mekaar, bo-oor die gebabbel van mense en die geknars van swaar trommels.

Die eerste paar trokke is reeds vol studente, party hang deur die vensters en gesels met hul families, ander baklei oor wie sit waar. Harry stoot sy trollie langs die perron af op soek na ’n oop sitplek. Hy stap verby ’n rondegestigseun wat klaerig sê, “Ouma, my padda is al weer weg.”

“Ai tog, Neville,” hoor Harry die ou dame sug.

’n Seun met Rastalokke is omring deur ’n klein skare.

“Laat ons sien, Lee, komaan.”

Die seun lig die deksel van die doos wat hy in sy arms hou en die mense om hom skree en gil toe iets daarbinne ’n lang, harige arm uitsteek.

Harry druk deur die skare tot hy by ’n leë kompartement na aan die punt van die trein kom. Hy sit Hedwig eerste in en begin om die trommel by die deur in te sukkel. Hy probeer die een punt op die trappe tel, maar kan dit skaars lig en laat val dit twee keer hard op sy voet.

“Kan ons jou help?” Dis een van die rooikop-tweelingseuns wat hy deur die loket gevolg het.

“Ja, asseblief,” sê Harry hygend.

“Haai, Fred, kom help ’n bietjie!”

Met die tweeling se hulp staan Harry se trommel uiteindelik veilig in ’n hoek van die kompartement.

“Dankie,” sê Harry en vee sy natgeswete hare uit sy oë.

“Wat’s dit?” sê een van die tweeling skielik en wys na Harry se litteken.

“Sjoe,” sê die ander een, “is jy tog nie – ?”

“Hy is,” sê die eerste een. “Of is jy nie?” vra hy vir Harry.

“Wat?” vra Harry.

“Harry Potter, natuurlik,” sê die tweeling in ’n koor.

“O, hy,” sê Harry. “Ek bedoel, ja, ek is.”

Die twee seuns gaap hom aan en Harry voel hoe hy rooi word. Toe, tot sy verligting, kom ’n stem deur die trein se oop deur.

“Fred? George? Is julle daar?”

“Ons kom, Ma.”

Met ’n laaste kyk in Harry se rigting hop die tweeling van die trein af.

Harry gaan sit langs die venster van waar hy die rooikopfamilie op die perron kan sien en kan hoor wat hulle sê. Hul ma het so pas haar sakdoek uitgehaal.

“Ron, daar’s iets op jou neus.”

Die jongste seun probeer padgee, maar sy gryp hom vas en begin die punt van sy neus vryf.

“Ma – hou op!” Hy ruk hom los.

“Oe, het Ronnie-baba tog nie iets op sy snossie nie?” sê een van die tweeling.

“Sjarrap,” sê Ron.

“Waar’s Percy?” vra hul ma.

“Daar kom hy.”

Die oudste seun kom aangestap. Hy het reeds ’n wapperende Hogwarts-mantel aan en Harry sien ’n silwer wapentjie met die letter P daarop teen sy bors skitter.

“Kan nie lank bly nie, Ma,” sê hy. “Ek sit heel voor, die prefekte het twee kompartemente –”

“O, dus is jy nou ’n *prefek*, Percy?” sê een van die tweeling asof hy baie verbaas is. “Jy moes gesê het, hoe moes ons weet?”

“Wa-wa-wag, ek onthou so vaagweg dat hy iets *genoem* het,” sê die ander tweeling, “een keer –”

“Of was dit dalk twee keer – ?”

“Elke minuut van die dag –”

“Die hele liewe vakansie –”

“Ag, sjarrap,” sê Percy die Prefek.

“En hoekom het Percy ’n nuwe mantel gekry?” sê een van die tweeling.

“Omdat hy ’n *prefek* is,” sê sy ma trots. “Goed, my skat, geniet die kwartaal en stuur ’n uil wanneer jy aankom.”

Sy soen Percy op die wang en hy stap weg. Toe draai sy na die tweeling.

“Nou, julle twee – vanjaar moet julle julsself gedra. As ek nog een uil moet kry wat sê dat julle iets soos – soos ’n toilet opgeblaas het, of –”

“’n Toilet opgeblaas het? Ons het nog nooit ’n toilet opgeblaas nie!”

“Goeie idee, dankie, Ma.”

“Dis nie *snaaks* nie. En kyk na Ron.”

“Moet Ma nie bekommer nie, klein Ronnie is veilig by ons.”

“Sjarrap,” sê Ron weer. Hy is amper so lank soos die tweeling en sy neus is nog steeds pienk waar sy ma dit gevryf het.

“Haai, Ma, raai wat? Raai wie’s op die trein?”

Harry sit vinnig terug sodat hulle hom nie kan sien loer nie.

“Ma weet daardie swartkopseun wat hier agter ons was op die stasie? Weet Ma wie hy is?”

“Wie?”

“*Harry Potter!*”

Harry hoor die dogtertjie se stem.

“Oe, Mammie, kan ek op die trein klim en gaan kyk hoe hy lyk, asseblief, Mammie, asseblief . . .”

“Jy’t hom klaar gesien, Ginny, en die arme kind is nie iets in ’n diere-tuin waarna ’n mens kan gaan kyk nie. Is dit regtig hy, Fred? Hoe weet jy?”

“Hom gevra. Die litteken gesien. Dis regtig daar – soos weerlig.”

“Arme *kind* – g’n wonder hy was alleen nie, ek het gewonder. Hy was so hoflik toe hy vra hoe om op die perron te kom.”

“Wat maak dit tog saak; dink Ma hy kan onthou hoe Jy-Weet-Wie lyk?”

Hul ma is meteens baie streng.

“Ek verbied jou om hom te vra, Fred. Waag dit net. Asof hy daaraan herinner moet word op sy eerste dag by die skool.”

“Oukei, moenie ’n beroerte kry nie . . .”

’n Fluitjie blaas.

“Opskud,” sê hul ma en die drie seuns klouter op die trein. Hulle leun deur die venster om almal tot siens te soen, en hul sussie begin huil.

“Moenie, Ginny, ons sal vir jou tonne uile stuur.”

“Ons stuur vir jou ’n Hogwarts-toiletsitplek.”

“*George!*”

“Net ’n grappie, Ma.”

Die trein begin beweeg. Harry sien hoe die seuns se ma en hul suster waai, half laggend en half in trane, en hoe hulle langs die trein hardloop en probeer byhou terwyl die trein spoed optel. Uiteindelik val hulle terug en waai.

Harry kyk hoe die dogtertjie en haar ma verdwyn toe die trein om 'n draai gaan. Huise flits verby die venster. Harry se hart spring van opwinding. Hy weet nie waarheen hy gaan nie – maar dit moet beter wees as dit wat hy agter hom laat.

Die deur na die kompartement gly oop en die jongste rooikopseun kom in.

“Sit iemand hier?” vra hy en wys na die plek oorkant Harry. “Al die ander plekke is reeds geneem.”

Harry skud sy kop en die seun gaan sit. Hy loer na Harry en kyk dan weer vinnig deur die venster en maak of hy glad nie geloer het nie. Harry sien daar is nog steeds 'n swart merk op sy neus.

“Haai, Ron.”

Die tweeling is terug.

“Luister, ons gaan na die middel van die trein – Lee Jordaan het 'n reuse-tarantula daar.”

“Goed,” mompel Ron.

“Harry,” sê die ander tweeling, “het ons onself al voorgestel? Fred en George Weasley. Dis ons broer Ron. Sien julle later.”

“Tot siens,” sê Harry en Ron. Die tweeling maak die kompartement-deur agter hulle toe.

“Is jy regtig Harry Potter?” blaker Ron dit uit.

Harry knik.

“O – wel, ek dog dis weer een van Fred en George se grappe,” sê Ron. “En het jy regtig – jy weet . . .”

Hy wys na Harry se voorkop.

Harry stoot sy kuif terug sodat Ron die litteken wat soos 'n weerligstraal lyk, kan sien. Ron staar.

“So dis waar Jy-Weet-Wie – ?”

“Ja,” sê Harry, “maar ek kan niks daarvan onthou nie.”

“Niks?” vra Ron gretig.

“Wel – ek onthou 'n heldergroen lig, maar niks anders nie.”

“Sjoe,” sê Ron. Vir 'n paar oomblikke sit en staar hy na Harry. Toe, asof hy skielik beseft wat hy doen, kyk hy weer vinnig deur die venster.

“Is almal in jou familie towenaars?” vra Harry, vir wie Ron net so interessant is as wat hy vir Ron is.

“H'm – ja, ek dink so,” sê Ron. “Ek dink my ma het 'n kleinneef wat 'n rekenmeester is, maar ons praat nooit oor hom nie.”

“So jy weet al baie van toor af?”

Die Weasleys is duidelik een van die ou towenaarfamilies waarvan die bleek seun in Diagonaalstraat gepraat het.

“Ek hoor jy het by Moggels grootgeword,” sê Ron. “Hoe was hulle?”

“Aaklig – wel, nie almal van hulle nie. My tante en my oom en my nefie is; ek wens ek het liewer drie towenaarbroers gehad.”

“Vyf,” sê Ron. Om die een of ander rede lyk hy iesegrimmig. “Ek is die sesde in ons gesin om Hogwarts toe te gaan. Ek het ’n baie goeie voorbeeld om na te volg. Bill en Charlie is reeds weg – Bill was hoofseun en Charlie was kaptein van die Kwiddiek-span. En nou is Percy ’n prefek. George en Fred vang baie kattedekwaad aan, maar hulle kry steeds goeie punte en almal dink hulle is snaaks. Almal verwag dat ek net so goed soos al die ander moet doen, maar al kry ek dit reg, is dit ook sommers niks nie, want hulle het dit eerste gedoen. ’n Mens kry ook nooit iets nuuts nie, nie met vyf broers nie. Ek het Bill se ou mantel en Charlie se ou towerstaf en Percy se ou rot.”

Ron steek sy hand in sy sak en haal ’n vet gryns rot uit, wat vas aan die slaap is.

“Sy naam is Skille en hy is ’n nikswerd, hy word skaars wakker. My pa het vir Percy ’n uil gegee omdat hy ’n prefek is, maar hulle kon nie beko – ek meen, toe kry ek vir Skille.”

Ron se ore word pienk. Dis of hy dink hy het te veel gesê, want hy staar opnuut deur die venster.

Harry dink nie dis verkeerd as ’n mens nie ’n uil kan bekostig nie. Hy het self nie ’n sent gehad nie, tot so ’n maand gelede, en hy vertel vir Ron hoe hy Dudley se ou klere moes dra en nooit behoorlike verjaardagpresente gekry het nie. Dit lyk of Ron beter voel.

“. . . en tot Hagrid vir my gesê het, het ek nie eens geweet dat ek ’n towenaar is nie en ook nie van my ma-hulle of van Woldemort –”

Ron snak na asem.

“Wat nou?” vra Harry.

“Jy het Jy-Weet-Wie se naam gesê!” sê Ron en hy klink geskok en beïndruk. “Ek sou dink dat jy, van alle mense –”

“Ek probeer nie *dapper* of iets wees deur die naam te sê nie,” sê Harry. “Ek het nooit eens geweet ’n mens behoort dit nie te sê nie. Sien jy wat ek bedoel? Ek het baie om te leer . . . dit kan jy glo,” voeg hy by en vir die eerste keer sê hy dit wat hom die laaste tyd vreeslik pla, “ek wed ek gaan die vrotste in die klas wees.”

“Jy sal nie. Daar’s hope mense wat uit Moggel-gesinne kom en hulle leer vinnig genoeg.”

Soos hulle praat, neem die trein hulle uit Londen. Nou spoed hulle verby velde vol koeie en skape. Vir ’n rukkie is hulle stil en kyk bloot na die landerye en paaie wat verbyflikker.

Teen ongeveer halfeen is daar ’n gekletter in die gang en ’n glimlaggende vrou met kuiltjies in haar wange stoot die deur oop en sê, “Enigiets van die trollie af, kinders?”

Harry, wat geen ontbyt gehad het nie, spring orent, maar Ron se ore word van voor af pienk en hy mompel dat hy toebroodjies het. Harry loop gang toe.

By die Dursleys het hy nooit geld vir lekkers gehad nie, maar nou het hy sakke wat rinkel met goud en silwer en hy staan reg om soveel Mars Bars te koop as wat hy kan dra – maar die vrou het nie Mars Bars nie. Sy het wel Bertie Bott se Allegeurtjiebone, Droobel se Borrelgom, Sjokoladepaddas, Pampoentertjies, Hekseketel-koekies, Droptowerstaffies en allerhande ander snaakse goed wat Harry nog nooit gesien het nie. Hy wil alles probeer en koop 'n paar van elke soort. F'y betaal die vrou elf silwer-Sekels en sewe brons-Knoete.

Ron gaap hom aan toe Harry alles indra en op 'n oop sitplek omkeer.

“Jy's omtrent honger,” sê hy.

“Ek gaan dood,” sê Harry en vat 'n groot hap uit 'n pampoenkoekie.

Ron het 'n hompige pakkie uitgehaal en maak dit oop. Daar is vier toebroodjies in. Hy maak een oop en sê, “Sy vergeet altyd dat ek nie van boeliebief hou nie.”

“Ruil jou vir een van dié,” sê Harry en lig 'n tertjie op. “Toe –”

“Jy sal nie hiervan hou nie, dis droog,” sê Ron. “Sy't nie baie tyd nie, sien,” voeg hy vinnig by, “nie met vyf van ons nie.”

“Toe, man, vat 'n tertjie,” sê Harry wat nog nooit tevore iets gehad het om te deel nie, of iemand om dit mee te deel nie. Dis 'n lekker gevoel om hier by Ron te sit en al die tertjies en koekies op te eet (die toebroodjies lê eenkant, vergete).

“Wat is dit?” vra Harry vir Ron en hou die pakkie Sjokoladepaddas op. “Dis darem seker nie regte paddas nie, of hoe?” Hy begin voel dat niks hom meer kan verras nie.

“Nee,” sê Ron. “Kyk watter kaartjie dit is, ek moet nog vir Agrippa kry.”

“Wat?”

“O ja, jy weet mos nie – Sjokoladepaddas het kaartjies binne-in, jy weet, wat jy moet bymekaar maak – beroemde hekse en towenaars. Ek het al meer as vyfhonderd, maar ek het nog nie vir Agrippa of vir Ptolemeus nie.”

Harry maak sy Sjokoladepadda oop en haal die kaartjie uit. Dit het 'n man se gesig op. Hy dra halfmaanbrilglase, het 'n lang, krom neus en vloeiende silwer hare, baard en snor. Onderaan die prentjie staan sy naam: *Albus Dompeldorius*.

“So dit is Dompeldorius!” sê Harry.

“Moenie vir my sê jy het nog nie tevore van Dompeldorius gehoor nie!” sê Ron. “Kan ek ook 'n padda kry? Dalk is Agrippa – dankie –”

Harry draai sy kaart om en lees:

Albus Dompeldorius, tans skoolhoof by Hogwarts.

Word deur vele beskou as die grootste toenaar van die moderne era. Professor Dompeldorius is veral bekend vir sy

oorwinning in 1945 oor die donker towenaar, Grindelwald, vir die ontdekking van die twaalf gebruike van drakebloed en vir sy werk in die alchemie tesame met sy medewerker, Nicolas Flamel. Professor Dompeldorius luister graag na kamermusiek en speel gereeld 'n potjie rolbal.

Harry draai die kaartjie terug en sien tot sy verbasing dat Dompeldorius se gesig verdwyn het.

“Hy’s weg!”

“Maar jy kan nie verwag dat hy die hele liewe dag daar moet bly nie,” sê Ron. “Hy sal weer terugkom. Ag nee, ek het al weer vir Morgana gekry en ek het al omtrent ses van haar . . . wil jy dit hê? Jy kan begin versamel.”

Ron se oë dwaal na die hopie Sjokoladepaddas wat wag om oopgemaak te word.

“Help jouself,” sê Harry. “In die Moggel-wêreld bly mense in hul foto’s.”

“Regtig? So hulle beweeg glad nie?” Ron klink verstom. “Dis *snaaks!*”

Harry sien hoe Dompeldorius teruggly in die foto op die kaartjie en gee hom ’n klein glimlaggie. Ron stel meer daarin belang om die paddas te eet as om na die Beroemde Hekse en Towenaars op die kaartjies te kyk, maar Harry kan sy oë nie van hulle afhou nie. Spoedig het hy nie net vir Dompeldorius en Morgana nie, maar ook vir Hengist van Woodcroft, Alberick Greunen, Circe, Paracelsus en Merlin. Hy slaag uiteindelik daarin om sy oë weg te skeur van die druïde Clidina, wat haar neus krap, en maak ’n pakkie van Bertie Bott se Allegeurtjiefone oop.

“Oppas, hoor,” waarsku Ron vir Harry. “As hulle sê alle geure dan *bedoel* hulle dit – jy kry al die gewones soos sjokolade en peperment en marmelade, maar dan’s daar ook spinasie en lewer en afval. George sê hy’t een keer een gehad wat soos nat weerwolf gesmaak het.”

Ron tel ’n groen boon op, bekyk dit van alle kante en byt ’n stukkie af.

“Jig! – sien? Spruitjies.”

Die Allegeurtjiefone is groot pret. Harry kry roosterbrood, kokosneut, tamatie-boontjies, aarbei, kerrie, gras, koffie, sardientjies en is dapper genoeg om te knibbel aan ’n gryse waaraan Ron nie wou raak nie. Dit is peper.

Die landskap wat nou verby die venster vlieg, word al woester. Die netjiese landerye is weg. Nou is daar woude, kronkelende riviere en donkergroen heuwels.

Daar is ’n klop aan die deur van hul kompartement en die seun met die ronde gesig wat Harry op perron nege-en-’n-driekwart gesien het, kom in. Hy is tranerig.

“Ek’s jammer,” sê hy, “maar het julle nie my padda gesien nie?”

Toe hulle hul koppe skud, gil hy, "Hy's weg! Hy raak aanmekaar weg!"

"Jy sal hom wel weer kry," sê Harry.

"Seker," sê die seun miserabel. "Wel, as julle hom sien . . ."

Hy loop weer.

"Ek weet nie hoekom hy so te kere gaan nie," sê Ron. "As ek 'n padda gebring het, het ek hom so gou moontlik verloor. Maar ek moet sê, ek het vir Skille, so ek kan nie praat nie."

Die rot slaap nog steeds op Ron se skoot.

"Hy kan doodgaan en 'n mens sal nie die verskil agterkom nie," sê Ron bekaf. "Ek het gister probeer om hom geel te maak, sodat hy 'n bietjie interessanter kan lyk, maar dit wou nie werk nie. Ek sal jou wys. Kyk . . ."

Hy krap in sy trommel en haal 'n erg vernielde towerstaf uit. Dit is plek-plek afgesplinter en iets wits blink aan die punt.

"Eenhoringhare steek al amper uit. Elk geval –"

Hy het net sy towerstaf gelig toe die deur van die kompartement weer oopgaan. Die paddalose seun is terug, maar dié keer is daar 'n meisie by hom. Sy dra reeds haar nuwe Hogwarts-klere.

"Het iemand dalk 'n padda gesien? Neville het syne verloor," sê sy. Sy het 'n baasspelerige soort stem, 'n massa ruie bruin hare en groterige voortande.

"Ons het klaar vir hom gesê ons het hom nie gesien nie," sê Ron, maar die meisie luister nie, sy kyk na die towerstaf in sy hand.

"O, toor jy? Laat ek 'n bietjie sien."

Sy gaan sit. Ron lyk uit die veld geslaan.

"O – oukei dan."

Hy maak keel skoon.

"Sonskyn, margrietjies en stuifmeel,

Maak hierdie simpele, vet rot goudgeel."

Hy waai sy towerstaf, maar niks gebeur nie. Skille is nog steeds grys, en vas aan die slaap.

"Is jy seker dis 'n regte towerspreuk?" sê die meisie. "Dit werk nie eintlik nie, nè? Ek het 'n paar eenvoudige towerspreuke uitprobeer, net om te oefen, en hulle het almal gewerk. Niemand in my familie het toermagte nie, dit was so 'n verrassing toe ek my brief kry, ek was so in my skik, ek bedoel, dis die heel beste skool vir towery wat daar is, het ek gehoor – ek het al ons voorgeskrewe boeke uit my kop geleer, ek hoop dit sal help – russen hakies, ek is Hermien la Grange, en julle?"

Dit alles is baie vinnig gesê.

Harry kyk na Ron en is verlig om aan sy verstomde gesig te sien dat hy beslis ook nie al die voorgeskrewe boeke uit sy kop kan opsê nie.

"Ek is Ron Weasley," mompel Ron.

"Harry Potter," sê Harry.

"Is jy regtig?" sê Hermien. "Ek weet alles van jou af – ek het 'n paar

ekstra boeke gekoop vir aanvullende leeswerk en jy is in *Moderne Toorgeskiedenis* en in *Die Opkoms en Val van die Donker Kunste* en in *Groot lowerverskynsels van die Twintigste Eeu*.”

“Is ek?” Harry se kop draai.

“Goeiste, weet jy nie eens nie, ek sou alles uitgevind het as dit ek was,” sê Hermien. “Weet enigeen van julle twee in watter huis julle gaan wees? Ek het al oral gevra en ek hoop ek is in Griffindor, dit klink verreweg die beste,” ek hoor Dompeldorius was ook daar, maar ek skat Raweklou is ook nie te sleg nie . . . In elk geval, ons gaan gou Neville se padda soek. Julle moet aantrek, ons is nou-nou daar . . .”

Sy stap uit en neem die paddalose seun met haar saam.

“Maak nie saak in watter huis ek is nie, solank sy net nie daar is nie,” sê Ron. Hy gooi sy towerstaf terug in sy trommel. “Simpel towerspreuk – George het dit vir my gegee, ek wed hy’t geweet dit werk nie.”

“In watter huis is jou broers?” vra Harry.

“Griffindor,” sê Ron. Hy lyk al hoe meer bedruk. “My ma en pa was ook daar. Ek weet nie wat hulle sal doen as ek dit nie maak nie. Ek sou sê Raweklou is nie te sleg nie, maar wat as hulle my in Slibberin sit.”

“Dis die huis waarin Wol . . . ek meen, Jy-Weet-Wie was?”

“Ja,” sê Ron. Hy sak terug op sy sitplek en lyk omgekrap.

“Jy weet, ek dink die punte van Skille se snorbaarde is effens ligter,” sê Harry om Ron op te beur. “Wat doen jou ouer broers nou dat hulle weg is?”

Harry wonder wat ’n towenaar doen wanneer hy klaar is met skool.

“Charlie is in Roemenië; hy bestudeer drake en Bill is in Afrika. Hy doen iets vir Edelgolt,” sê Ron. “Het jy gehoor wat by Edelgolt gebeur het? Dit was in *Die Daaglikse Profeet*, maar jy het dit seker nie by die Moggels te lese gekry nie – iemand het ’n hoësekuriteitskuis probeer beroof.”

Harry staar.

“Regtig? En wat het met hom gebeur?”

“Niks, dis hoekom dit sulke groot nuus is. Hy’s nie gevang nie. My pa sê dit moet iemand met baie sterk Donker Magte wees om by Edelgolt in te breek, maar hulle dink nie hy het iets gesteel nie – dit is wat snaaks is. Almal is natuurlik bang dat Jy-Weet-Wie dalk daaragter sit.”

Harry verteer die nuus in sy brein. Hy kry ’n prikkie vrees elke keer dat Jy-Weet-Wie genoem word. Hy reken dis seker deel van gewoonde raak aan die towerwêreld, maar dit was baie lekkerder toe hy nog “Woldemort” kon sê sonder om bang te word.

“Vir watter Kwiddiek-span skree jy?” vra Ron.

“H’m – ek ken hulle nie,” erken Harry.

“Wat!” Ron lyk dronkgeslaan. “Wag net, dis die beste spel in die wêreld –” Net daar trek hy los en verduidelik alles oor die vier balle en die posisies van die sewe spelers. Hy beskryf beroemde wedstryde wat hy

saam met sy broers bygewoon het en die besem wat hy eendag gaan koop as hy geld het. Hy is net besig om Harry deur die fyner punte van die spel te neem toe die deur van die kompartement weer oopgaan, maar hierdie keer is dit nie Neville, die paddalose seun, of Hermien la Grange nie.

Drie seuns kom in en Harry herken die middelste een dadelik: dis die bleek seun van Madame Malkin se mantelwinkel. Hy staar na Harry met heelwat meer belangstelling as wat hy daar in Diagonaalstraat gehad het.

“Is dit waar?” vra hy. “Almal op die trein sê Harry Potter is in hierdie kompartement. So dis dan jy, of hoe?”

“Ja,” sê Harry. Hy kyk na die ander seuns. Albei van hulle is dikkerig en lyk baie gemeen. Hulle staan soos lyfwagte aan weerskante van die bleek seun.

“O, dis Krabbe en dit is Goliat,” sê die bleek seun ongeërg toe hy Harry se blik onderskep. “My naam is Malfoy, Draco Malfoy.”

Ron gee ’n klein hoesie wat bedoel kan wees om ’n gegiggel weg te steek. Draco Malfoy gluur hom aan.

“Dink my naam is snaaks, hè? Hoef nie te vra wie jy is nie. My pa sê al die Weasleys het rooi hare, sproete en meer kinders as wat hulle kan bekostig.”

Hy draai terug na Harry.

“Jy sal gou agterkom dat sommige towenaarfamilies baie beter is as ander, Potter. Jy wil nie met die verkeerde soort vriende maak nie. Ek kan jou daarmee help.”

Hy steek ’n hand uit om Harry s’n te skud, maar Harry neem dit nie.

“Ek dink ek kan self sien watter die verkeerde soort is, dankie,” sê hy koeltjies.

Draco Malfoy word nie rooi nie, maar ’n pienk kleurtjie kruip oor sy bleek wange.

“Ek sal versigtig wees as ek jy is, Potter,” sê hy stadig. “As jy nie ’n bietjie beleefder is nie, sal jy dieselfde paadjie as jou ouers loop. Hulle het ook nie geweet wat vir hulle goed is nie. As jy wil meng met hoipolloi soos die Weasleys en daardie Hagrid, sal dit afgee aan jou.”

Sowel Harry as Ron kom orent. Ron se gesig is so rooi soos sy hare.

“Sê dit weer,” sê hy.

“So jy soek baklei?” Malfoy grynslag.

“Behalwe as julle nou waai.” Harry klink dapperder as wat hy voel, want Krabbe en Goliat is ’n hele ent groter as hy of Ron.

“Maar ons is nie lus om te loop nie, is ons, manne? Ons het al ons kos opgeëet en julle het nog baie.”

Goliat steek ’n hand uit na die Sjokoladepaddas langs Ron – Ron spring vorentoe, maar voor hy aan Goliat kan raak, los die seun ’n vreeslike kreet.

Skille, die rot, hang aan sy vinger, sy skerp tande is diep in Goliat se

kneukels geslaan – Krabbe en Malfoy retireer terwyl Goliath Skille al gil-lend deur die lug swaai. Toe hy Skille uiteindelik afskud en hy die ven-ster tref, laat vat die driestuks net daar. Dalk is hulle bang daar skuil nog rotte tussen die lekkers, of dalk het hulle voetstappe gehoor, want 'n oomblik later kom Hermien la Grange in.

“Wat het hier aangegaan?” sê sy en staar na die lekkers wat oor die vloer gesaai lê en na Ron wat Skille aan sy stert optel.

“Ek dink hy's bewusteloos,” sê Ron vir Harry. Weer kyk hy na Skille. “Nee – ek kan dit nie glo nie – hy's vas aan die slaap.”

Dis ook net hoe dit is.

“So jy ken vir Malfoy?” vra Ron.

Harry verduidelik hoe hy Malfoy in Diagonaalstraat ontmoet het.

“Ek het stories gehoor oor sy familie,” sê Ron grimmig. “Hulle was van die eerstes wat na ons kant toe teruggekom het na Jy-Weet-Wie verdwyn het. Het gesê hulle was getoor. My pa glo dit nie. Hy sê Malfoy se pa kon nie wag om by die Donker Kant aan te sluit nie.” Hy draai na Hermien. “Kan ons jou help?”

“Julle moet opskud en jul klere aantrek, ek was nou net daar voor en ek het die drywer gevra en hy't gesê ons is amper daar. Julle het nie baklei nie, het julle? Julle sal in die moeilikheid wees nog voor ons by die skool is!”

“Skille het baklei, nie ons nie,” sê Ron en trek 'n gesig. “Gee jy om om uit te gaan terwyl ons aantrek?”

“Oukei – ek het net hierheen gekom omdat die mense daar buite verskriklik kinderagtig is. Hulle hardloop op en af in die gange,” sê Hermien neusoptrekkerig. “En daar is 'n vuil kol op jou neus, weet jy?”

Toe sy uitstap, gluur Ron haar agterna. Harry kyk deur die venster. Dit word vinnig donker. Hy sien berge en woude onder 'n persblou hemel. Dit lyk of die trein stadiger ry.

Hy en Ron trek hul baadjies uit en gooi die lang swart kledingstukke oor hul koppe. Ron s'n is 'n bietjie kort vir hom, jy kan sy tekkies onder sien uitsteek.

'n Stem eggo deur die trein: “Ons sal binne vyf minute by Hogwarts wees. Laat jul bagasie asseblief op die trein, dit sal vir julle skool toe ge-neem word.”

Harry se maag trek senuagtig saam en hy sien Ron lyk bleek onder sy sproete. Hulle stop die laaste klompie lekkers in hul sakke en sluit aan by die skare wat in die gange saamdrom.

Die trein loop al stadiger en staan uiteindelik stil. Mense druk na die deure en klim uit op die klein, donker perron. Harry bewe in die koue naglug. Toe verskyn 'n lamp bo die koppe van die skare kinders en Harry hoor 'n bekende stem: “Eerstejaars! Eerstejaars hierdie kant toe! Alles reg, Harry?”

Hagrid se groot, harige gesig straal bo-oor die see van koppe.

“Komaan, volg my – nog eerstejaars iewers? Kyk waar julle loop! Eerstejaars volg my!”

Al struikelend en glyend strompel hulle agter Hagrid aan teen ’n bitter steil en nou paadjie tot bo. Dit is so donker aan weerskante van die pad dat Harry dink daar moet digte bome om hulle wees. Niemand praat nie. Neville, die seun wat aanhoudend sy padda verloor, snuif ’n paar keer.

“Julle sal Hogwarts nou-nou sien,” roep Hagrid oor sy skouer, “dis net om die draai.”

Daar is ’n harde “Oooooee!”

Die nou paadjie het onverwags oopgemaak en hulle staan op die rand van ’n reuse- swart meer. Aan die ander kant van die meer, op die kruin van ’n hoë berg, en met vensters wat skitter in die lig van die sterre, staan ’n enorme kasteel vol torinkies en kantele.

“Nie meer as vier per boot nie!” roep Hagrid en wys na ’n vloot klein bootjies wat op die water aan die kant dobber. Harry en Ron klim in ’n boot, gevolg deur Neville en Hermien.

“Is almal in?” skree Hagrid, wat alleen in ’n boot sit. “Goed dan – VOORWAARTS!”

Die vloot bootjies trek tegelyk weg. Hulle gly oor die meer wat so glad soos ’n spieël is. Almal staar in stilte na die massiewe kasteel wat bo hulle uittroon terwyl hulle al nader aan die krans waarop dit gebou is, kom.

“Sak die koppe!” skree Hagrid toe die eerste bote die krans bereik. Almal knak hul koppe en die klein bootjies dra hulle deur ’n gordyn van klimop wat die breë opening in die wand van die krans verberg. Hulle vaar deur ’n donker tunnel, wat lyk of dit hulle tot onder die kasteel neem, tot hulle ’n soort ondergrondse hawe bereik. Hier klim hulle uit op ’n plaat rotse en klein klippies.

“Haai, daar! Is dit jou padda?” sê Hagrid wat die bootjies nagaan soos almal uitklim.

“Trevor!” roep Neville verheug uit en hou sy hande bak. Toe klouter hulle op langs ’n deurgang in die rotse en loop al agter Hagrid se lamp aan, tot hulle uiteindelik op sagte, klam gras in die skaduwee van die kasteel staan.

Hulle klim ’n stel kliptrappe uit en drom saam voor die massiewe eikehoutdeure.

“Is almal hier? Jy daar, het jy nog jou padda?”

Hagrid lig ’n tamaai vuus en klop drie maal teen die kasteeldeur.

CHAPTER SEVEN



THE SORTING HAT

The door swung open at once. A tall, black-haired witch in emerald-green robes stood there. She had a very stern face and Harry's first thought was that this was not someone to cross.

"The first years, Professor McGonagall," said Hagrid.

"Thank you, Hagrid. I will take them from here."

She pulled the door wide. The entrance hall was so big you could have fit the whole of the Dursleys' house in it. The stone walls were lit with flaming torches like the ones at Gringotts, the ceiling was too high to make out, and a magnificent marble staircase facing them led to the upper floors.

They followed Professor McGonagall across the flagged stone floor. Harry could hear the drone of hundreds of voices from a doorway to the right — the rest of the school must already be here — but Professor McGonagall showed the first years into a small, empty chamber off the hall. They crowded in, standing rather closer together than they would usually have done, peering about nervously.

"Welcome to Hogwarts," said Professor McGonagall. "The start-of-term banquet will begin shortly, but before you take your seats in the Great Hall, you will be sorted into your Houses. The Sorting is a very important ceremony because, while you are here, your House will be something like your family within Hogwarts. You will have classes with the rest of your House, sleep in your House dormitory, and spend free time in your House common room.

"The four Houses are called Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw,

and Slytherin. Each House has its own noble history and each has produced outstanding witches and wizards. While you are at Hogwarts, your triumphs will earn your House points, while any rule-breaking will lose House points. At the end of the year, the House with the most points is awarded the House Cup, a great honor. I hope each of you will be a credit to whichever House becomes yours.

“The Sorting Ceremony will take place in a few minutes in front of the rest of the school. I suggest you all smarten yourselves up as much as you can while you are waiting.”

Her eyes lingered for a moment on Neville’s cloak, which was fastened under his left ear, and on Ron’s smudged nose. Harry nervously tried to flatten his hair.

“I shall return when we are ready for you,” said Professor McGonagall. “Please wait quietly.”

She left the chamber. Harry swallowed.

“How exactly do they sort us into Houses?” he asked Ron.

“Some sort of test, I think. Fred said it hurts a lot, but I think he was joking.”

Harry’s heart gave a horrible jolt. A test? In front of the whole school? But he didn’t know any magic yet — what on earth would he have to do? He hadn’t expected something like this the moment they arrived. He looked around anxiously and saw that everyone else looked terrified, too. No one was talking much except Hermione Granger, who was whispering very fast about all the spells she’d learned and wondering which one she’d need. Harry tried hard not to listen to her. He’d never been more nervous, never, not even when

he'd had to take a school report home to the Dursleys saying that he'd somehow turned his teacher's wig blue. He kept his eyes fixed on the door. Any second now, Professor McGonagall would come back and lead him to his doom.

Then something happened that made him jump about a foot in the air — several people behind him screamed.

“What the — ?”

He gasped. So did the people around him. About twenty ghosts had just streamed through the back wall. Pearly-white and slightly transparent, they glided across the room talking to one another and hardly glancing at the first years. They seemed to be arguing. What looked like a fat little monk was saying: “Forgive and forget, I say, we ought to give him a second chance —”

“My dear Friar, haven't we given Peeves all the chances he deserves? He gives us all a bad name and you know, he's not really even a ghost — I say, what are you all doing here?”

A ghost wearing a ruff and tights had suddenly noticed the first years.

Nobody answered.

“New students!” said the Fat Friar, smiling around at them. “About to be Sorted, I suppose?”

A few people nodded mutely.

“Hope to see you in Hufflepuff!” said the Friar. “My old House, you know.”

“Move along now,” said a sharp voice. “The Sorting Ceremony's about to start.”

Professor McGonagall had returned. One by one, the ghosts floated

away through the opposite wall.

“Now, form a line,” Professor McGonagall told the first years, “and follow me.”

Feeling oddly as though his legs had turned to lead, Harry got into line behind a boy with sandy hair, with Ron behind him, and they walked out of the chamber, back across the hall, and through a pair of double doors into the Great Hall.

Harry had never even imagined such a strange and splendid place. It was lit by thousands and thousands of candles that were floating in midair over four long tables, where the rest of the students were sitting. These tables were laid with glittering golden plates and goblets. At the top of the hall was another long table where the teachers were sitting. Professor McGonagall led the first years up here, so that they came to a halt in a line facing the other students, with the teachers behind them. The hundreds of faces staring at them looked like pale lanterns in the flickering candlelight. Dotted here and there among the students, the ghosts shone misty silver. Mainly to avoid all the staring eyes, Harry looked upward and saw a velvety black ceiling dotted with stars. He heard Hermione whisper, “It’s bewitched to look like the sky outside. I read about it in *Hogwarts: A History*.”

It was hard to believe there was a ceiling there at all, and that the Great Hall didn’t simply open on to the heavens.

Harry quickly looked down again as Professor McGonagall silently placed a four-legged stool in front of the first years. On top of the stool she put a pointed wizard’s hat. This hat was patched and frayed and extremely dirty. Aunt Petunia wouldn’t have let it in the

house.

Maybe they had to try and get a rabbit out of it, Harry thought wildly, that seemed the sort of thing — noticing that everyone in the hall was now staring at the hat, he stared at it, too. For a few seconds, there was complete silence. Then the hat twitched. A rip near the brim opened wide like a mouth — and the hat began to sing:

*“Oh, you may not think I’m pretty,
But don’t judge on what you see,
I’ll eat myself if you can find
A smarter hat than me.
You can keep your bowlers black,
Your top hats sleek and tall,
For I’m the Hogwarts Sorting Hat
And I can cap them all.
There’s nothing hidden in your head
The Sorting Hat can’t see,
So try me on and I will tell you
Where you ought to be.
You might belong in Gryffindor,
Where dwell the brave at heart,
Their daring, nerve, and chivalry
Set Gryffindors apart;
You might belong in Hufflepuff,
Where they are just and loyal,
Those patient Hufflepuffs are true
And unafraid of toil;
Or yet in wise old Ravenclaw,*

*If you've a ready mind,
Where those of wit and learning,
Will always find their kind;
Or perhaps in Slytherin
You'll make your real friends,
Those cunning folk use any means
To achieve their ends.
So put me on! Don't be afraid!
And don't get in a flap!
You're in safe hands (though I have none)
For I'm a Thinking Cap!"*

The whole hall burst into applause as the hat finished its song. It bowed to each of the four tables and then became quite still again.

“So we’ve just got to try on the hat!” Ron whispered to Harry. “I’ll kill Fred, he was going on about wrestling a troll.”

Harry smiled weakly. Yes, trying on the hat was a lot better than having to do a spell, but he did wish they could have tried it on without everyone watching. The hat seemed to be asking rather a lot; Harry didn’t feel brave or quick-witted or any of it at the moment. If only the hat had mentioned a House for people who felt a bit queasy, that would have been the one for him.

Professor McGonagall now stepped forward holding a long roll of parchment.

“When I call your name, you will put on the hat and sit on the stool to be sorted,” she said. “Abbott, Hannah!”

A pink-faced girl with blonde pigtails stumbled out of line, put on the hat, which fell right down over her eyes, and sat down. A

moment's pause —

“HUFFLEPUFF!” shouted the hat.

The table on the right cheered and clapped as Hannah went to sit down at the Hufflepuff table. Harry saw the ghost of the Fat Friar waving merrily at her.

“Bones, Susan!”

“HUFFLEPUFF!” shouted the hat again, and Susan scuttled off to sit next to Hannah.

“Boot, Terry!”

“RAVENCLAW!”

The table second from the left clapped this time; several Ravenclaws stood up to shake hands with Terry as he joined them.

“Brocklehurst, Mandy” went to Ravenclaw too, but “Brown, Lavender” became the first new Gryffindor, and the table on the far left exploded with cheers; Harry could see Ron's twin brothers catcalling.

“Bulstrode, Millicent” then became a Slytherin. Perhaps it was Harry's imagination, after all he'd heard about Slytherin, but he thought they looked like an unpleasant lot.

He was starting to feel definitely sick now. He remembered being picked for teams during gym at his old school. He had always been last to be chosen, not because he was no good, but because no one wanted Dudley to think they liked him.

“Finch-Fletchley, Justin!”

“HUFFLEPUFF!”

Sometimes, Harry noticed, the hat shouted out the House at once, but at others it took a little while to decide. “Finnigan, Seamus,” the

sandy-haired boy next to Harry in the line, sat on the stool for almost a whole minute before the hat declared him a Gryffindor.

“Granger, Hermione!”

Hermione almost ran to the stool and jammed the hat eagerly on her head.

“GRYFFINDOR!” shouted the hat. Ron groaned.

A horrible thought struck Harry, as horrible thoughts always do when you’re very nervous. What if he wasn’t chosen at all? What if he just sat there with the hat over his eyes for ages, until Professor McGonagall jerked it off his head and said there had obviously been a mistake and he’d better get back on the train?

When Neville Longbottom, the boy who kept losing his toad, was called, he fell over on his way to the stool. The hat took a long time to decide with Neville. When it finally shouted, “GRYFFINDOR,” Neville ran off still wearing it, and had to jog back amid gales of laughter to give it to “MacDougal, Morag.”

Malfoy swaggered forward when his name was called and got his wish at once: the hat had barely touched his head when it screamed, “SLYTHERIN!”

Malfoy went to join his friends Crabbe and Goyle, looking pleased with himself.

There weren’t many people left now.

“Moon” . . . , “Nott” . . . , “Parkinson” . . . , then a pair of twin girls, “Patil” and “Patil” . . . , then “Perks, Sally-Anne” . . . , and then, at last —

“Potter, Harry!”

As Harry stepped forward, whispers suddenly broke out like little

hissing fires all over the hall.

“*Potter*, did she say?”

“*The* Harry Potter?”

The last thing Harry saw before the hat dropped over his eyes was the hall full of people craning to get a good look at him. Next second he was looking at the black inside of the hat. He waited.

“Hmm,” said a small voice in his ear. “Difficult. Very difficult. Plenty of courage, I see. Not a bad mind either. There’s talent, oh my goodness, yes — and a nice thirst to prove yourself, now that’s interesting. . . . So where shall I put you?”

Harry gripped the edges of the stool and thought, *Not Slytherin, not Slytherin.*

“Not Slytherin, eh?” said the small voice. “Are you sure? You could be great, you know, it’s all here in your head, and Slytherin will help you on the way to greatness, no doubt about that — no? Well, if you’re sure — better be GRYFFINDOR!”

Harry heard the hat shout the last word to the whole hall. He took off the hat and walked shakily toward the Gryffindor table. He was so relieved to have been chosen and not put in Slytherin, he hardly noticed that he was getting the loudest cheer yet. Percy the Prefect got up and shook his hand vigorously, while the Weasley twins yelled, “We got Potter! We got Potter!” Harry sat down opposite the ghost in the ruff he’d seen earlier. The ghost patted his arm, giving Harry the sudden, horrible feeling he’d just plunged it into a bucket of ice-cold water.

He could see the High Table properly now. At the end nearest him sat Hagrid, who caught his eye and gave him the thumbs up. Harry

grinned back. And there, in the center of the High Table, in a large gold chair, sat Albus Dumbledore. Harry recognized him at once from the card he'd gotten out of the Chocolate Frog on the train. Dumbledore's silver hair was the only thing in the whole hall that shone as brightly as the ghosts. Harry spotted Professor Quirrell, too, the nervous young man from the Leaky Cauldron. He was looking very peculiar in a large purple turban.

And now there were only four people left to be sorted. "Thomas, Dean," a black boy even taller than Ron, joined Harry at the Gryffindor table. "Turpin, Lisa," became a Ravenclaw and then it was Ron's turn. He was pale green by now. Harry crossed his fingers under the table and a second later the hat had shouted, "GRYFFINDOR!"

Harry clapped loudly with the rest as Ron collapsed into the chair next to him.

"Well done, Ron, excellent," said Percy Weasley pompously across Harry as "Zabini, Blaise," was made a Slytherin. Professor McGonagall rolled up her scroll and took the Sorting Hat away.

Harry looked down at his empty gold plate. He had only just realized how hungry he was. The pumpkin pasties seemed ages ago.

Albus Dumbledore had gotten to his feet. He was beaming at the students, his arms opened wide, as if nothing could have pleased him more than to see them all there.

"Welcome!" he said. "Welcome to a new year at Hogwarts! Before we begin our banquet, I would like to say a few words. And here they are: Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak!

"Thank you!"

He sat back down. Everybody clapped and cheered. Harry didn't know whether to laugh or not.

"Is he — a bit mad?" he asked Percy uncertainly.

"Mad?" said Percy airily. "He's a genius! Best wizard in the world! But he is a bit mad, yes. Potatoes, Harry?"

Harry's mouth fell open. The dishes in front of him were now piled with food. He had never seen so many things he liked to eat on one table: roast beef, roast chicken, pork chops and lamb chops, sausages, bacon and steak, boiled potatoes, roast potatoes, fries, Yorkshire pudding, peas, carrots, gravy, ketchup, and, for some strange reason, peppermint humbugs.

The Dursleys had never exactly starved Harry, but he'd never been allowed to eat as much as he liked. Dudley had always taken anything that Harry really wanted, even if it made him sick. Harry piled his plate with a bit of everything except the peppermints and began to eat. It was all delicious.

"That does look good," said the ghost in the ruff sadly, watching Harry cut up his steak.

"Can't you — ?"

"I haven't eaten for nearly five hundred years," said the ghost. "I don't need to, of course, but one does miss it. I don't think I've introduced myself? Sir Nicholas de Mimsy-Porpington at your service. Resident ghost of Gryffindor Tower."

"I know who you are!" said Ron suddenly. "My brothers told me about you — you're Nearly Headless Nick!"

"I would *prefer* you to call me Sir Nicholas de Mimsy —" the ghost began stiffly, but sandy-haired Seamus Finnigan interrupted.

“*Nearly* Headless? How can you be *nearly* headless?”

Sir Nicholas looked extremely miffed, as if their little chat wasn’t going at all the way he wanted.

“Like *this*,” he said irritably. He seized his left ear and pulled. His whole head swung off his neck and fell onto his shoulder as if it was on a hinge. Someone had obviously tried to behead him, but not done it properly. Looking pleased at the stunned looks on their faces, Nearly Headless Nick flipped his head back onto his neck, coughed, and said, “So — new Gryffindors! I hope you’re going to help us win the House Championship this year? Gryffindors have never gone so long without winning. Slytherins have got the Cup six years in a row! The Bloody Baron’s becoming almost unbearable — he’s the Slytherin ghost.”

Harry looked over at the Slytherin table and saw a horrible ghost sitting there, with blank staring eyes, a gaunt face, and robes stained with silver blood. He was right next to Malfoy who, Harry was pleased to see, didn’t look too pleased with the seating arrangements.

“How did he get covered in blood?” asked Seamus with great interest.

“I’ve never asked,” said Nearly Headless Nick delicately.

When everyone had eaten as much as they could, the remains of the food faded from the plates, leaving them sparkling clean as before. A moment later the desserts appeared. Blocks of ice cream in every flavor you could think of, apple pies, treacle tarts, chocolate éclairs and jam doughnuts, trifle, strawberries, Jell-O, rice pudding . . .

As Harry helped himself to a treacle tart, the talk turned to their families.

“I’m half-and-half,” said Seamus. “Me dad’s a Muggle. Mum didn’t tell him she was a witch ’til after they were married. Bit of a nasty shock for him.”

The others laughed.

“What about you, Neville?” said Ron.

“Well, my gran brought me up and she’s a witch,” said Neville, “but the family thought I was all-Muggle for ages. My Great Uncle Algie kept trying to catch me off my guard and force some magic out of me — he pushed me off the end of Blackpool pier once, I nearly drowned — but nothing happened until I was eight. Great Uncle Algie came round for dinner, and he was hanging me out of an upstairs window by the ankles when my Great Auntie Enid offered him a meringue and he accidentally let go. But I bounced — all the way down the garden and into the road. They were all really pleased, Gran was crying, she was so happy. And you should have seen their faces when I got in here — they thought I might not be magic enough to come, you see. Great Uncle Algie was so pleased he bought me my toad.”

On Harry’s other side, Percy Weasley and Hermione were talking about lessons (“I *do* hope they start right away, there’s so much to learn, I’m particularly interested in Transfiguration, you know, turning something into something else, of course, it’s supposed to be very difficult —”; “You’ll be starting small, just matches into needles and that sort of thing —”).

Harry, who was starting to feel warm and sleepy, looked up at the High Table again. Hagrid was drinking deeply from his goblet. Professor McGonagall was talking to Professor Dumbledore.

Professor Quirrell, in his absurd turban, was talking to a teacher with greasy black hair, a hooked nose, and sallow skin.

It happened very suddenly. The hook-nosed teacher looked past Quirrell's turban straight into Harry's eyes — and a sharp, hot pain shot across the scar on Harry's forehead.

"Ouch!" Harry clapped a hand to his head.

"What is it?" asked Percy.

"N-nothing."

The pain had gone as quickly as it had come. Harder to shake off was the feeling Harry had gotten from the teacher's look — a feeling that he didn't like Harry at all.

"Who's that teacher talking to Professor Quirrell?" he asked Percy.

"Oh, you know Quirrell already, do you? No wonder he's looking so nervous, that's Professor Snape. He teaches Potions, but he doesn't want to — everyone knows he's after Quirrell's job. Knows an awful lot about the Dark Arts, Snape."

Harry watched Snape for a while, but Snape didn't look at him again.

At last, the desserts too disappeared, and Professor Dumbledore got to his feet again. The hall fell silent.

"Ahem — just a few more words now that we are all fed and watered. I have a few start-of-term notices to give you.

"First years should note that the forest on the grounds is forbidden to all pupils. And a few of our older students would do well to remember that as well."

Dumbledore's twinkling eyes flashed in the direction of the Weasley twins.

“I have also been asked by Mr. Filch, the caretaker, to remind you all that no magic should be used between classes in the corridors.

“Quidditch trials will be held in the second week of the term. Anyone interested in playing for their House teams should contact Madam Hooch.

“And finally, I must tell you that this year, the third-floor corridor on the right-hand side is out of bounds to everyone who does not wish to die a very painful death.”

Harry laughed, but he was one of the few who did.

“He’s not serious?” he muttered to Percy.

“Must be,” said Percy, frowning at Dumbledore. “It’s odd, because he usually gives us a reason why we’re not allowed to go somewhere — the forest’s full of dangerous beasts, everyone knows that. I do think he might have told us prefects, at least.”

“And now, before we go to bed, let us sing the school song!” cried Dumbledore. Harry noticed that the other teachers’ smiles had become rather fixed.

Dumbledore gave his wand a little flick, as if he was trying to get a fly off the end, and a long golden ribbon flew out of it, which rose high above the tables and twisted itself, snakelike, into words.

“Everyone pick their favorite tune,” said Dumbledore, “and off we go!”

And the school bellowed:

*“Hogwarts, Hogwarts, Hoggy Warty Hogwarts,
Teach us something please,
Whether we be old and bald
Or young with scabby knees,*

*Our heads could do with filling
With some interesting stuff,
For now they're bare and full of air,
Dead flies and bits of fluff,
So teach us things worth knowing,
Bring back what we've forgot,
Just do your best, we'll do the rest,
And learn until our brains all rot."*

Everybody finished the song at different times. At last, only the Weasley twins were left singing along to a very slow funeral march. Dumbledore conducted their last few lines with his wand and when they had finished, he was one of those who clapped loudest.

"Ah, music," he said, wiping his eyes. "A magic beyond all we do here! And now, bedtime. Off you trot!"

The Gryffindor first years followed Percy through the chattering crowds, out of the Great Hall, and up the marble staircase. Harry's legs were like lead again, but only because he was so tired and full of food. He was too sleepy even to be surprised that the people in the portraits along the corridors whispered and pointed as they passed, or that twice Percy led them through doorways hidden behind sliding panels and hanging tapestries. They climbed more staircases, yawning and dragging their feet, and Harry was just wondering how much farther they had to go when they came to a sudden halt.

A bundle of walking sticks was floating in midair ahead of them, and as Percy took a step toward them they started throwing themselves at him.

"Peeves," Percy whispered to the first years. "A poltergeist." He

raised his voice, “Peeves — show yourself.”

A loud, rude sound, like the air being let out of a balloon, answered.

“Do you want me to go to the Bloody Baron?”

There was a pop, and a little man with wicked, dark eyes and a wide mouth appeared, floating cross-legged in the air, clutching the walking sticks.

“Oooooooh!” he said, with an evil cackle. “Ickle Firsties! What fun!”

He swooped suddenly at them. They all ducked.

“Go away, Peeves, or the Baron’ll hear about this, I mean it!” barked Percy.

Peeves stuck out his tongue and vanished, dropping the walking sticks on Neville’s head. They heard him zooming away, rattling coats of armor as he passed.

“You want to watch out for Peeves,” said Percy, as they set off again. “The Bloody Baron’s the only one who can control him, he won’t even listen to us prefects. Here we are.”

At the very end of the corridor hung a portrait of a very fat woman in a pink silk dress.

“Password?” she said.

“Caput Draconis,” said Percy, and the portrait swung forward to reveal a round hole in the wall. They all scrambled through it — Neville needed a leg up — and found themselves in the Gryffindor common room, a cozy, round room full of squashy armchairs.

Percy directed the girls through one door to their dormitory and the boys through another. At the top of a spiral staircase — they were

obviously in one of the towers — they found their beds at last: five four-posters hung with deep red, velvet curtains. Their trunks had already been brought up. Too tired to talk much, they pulled on their pajamas and fell into bed.

“Great food, isn’t it?” Ron muttered to Harry through the hangings. “Get *off*, Scabbers! He’s chewing my sheets.”

Harry was going to ask Ron if he’d had any of the treacle tart, but he fell asleep almost at once.

Perhaps Harry had eaten a bit too much, because he had a very strange dream. He was wearing Professor Quirrell’s turban, which kept talking to him, telling him he must transfer to Slytherin at once, because it was his destiny. Harry told the turban he didn’t want to be in Slytherin; it got heavier and heavier; he tried to pull it off but it tightened painfully — and there was Malfoy, laughing at him as he struggled with it — then Malfoy turned into the hook-nosed teacher, Snape, whose laugh became high and cold — there was a burst of green light and Harry woke, sweating and shaking.

He rolled over and fell asleep again, and when he woke next day, he didn’t remember the dream at all.

Die Sorteelhoed

Die deur swaai dadelik oop. 'n Lang heks met swart hare en geklee in 'n smaraggroen kleed staan voor hulle. Sy het 'n streng gesig en Harry se eerste gedagte is dat 'n mens nie met haar moet sukkel nie.

“Die eerstejaars, professor McGonagall,” sê Hagrid.

“Dankie, Hagrid. Ek sal hulle verder neem.”

Sy maak die deur wyd oop. Die ingangsportaal is so groot, die Dursleys se hele huis kan daarin pas. Die klipmure is verlig met vlamme fakkels, net soos by Edelhout, die plafon is te hoog om duidelik te sien en daar is 'n manjifieke marmertap wat na die boonste verdiepings lei.

Hulle volg professor McGonagall oor die geplaveide klipvloer. Harry hoor die gedreun van honderde stemme van agter 'n deur na regs – die res van die skool moet reeds hier wees – maar professor McGonagall neem die eerstejaars na 'n kleinerige leë lokaal wat uit die voorportaal loop. Hulle bondel in en staan styf teen mekaar en kyk verbouereerd om hulle rond.

“Welkom by Hogwarts,” sê professor McGonagall. “Die banket wat ons altyd aan die begin van die kwartaal hou, gaan binnekort begin. Voor julle jul plekke in die Groot Saal kan inneem, moet julle in jul huise ingedeel word. Die Sortering is 'n baie belangrike seremonie, want, vir so lank as wat jy by Hogwarts is, is jou huis so goed soos jou familie. Jy loop klas saam met die res van jou huis, jy slaap in jou huis se slaapsaal en jou vrye tyd bring jy in jou huis se geselskamer deur.

“Die vier huise word Griffindor, Hoesenproes, Raweklou en Slibberin genoem. Elke huis het 'n trotse geskiedenis en elkeen het uitsonderlike hekse en towenaars opgelewer. Terwyl jy in Hogwarts is, sal jou prestasies vir jou huis punte verdien, terwyl die oortreding van reëls tot die verlies van punte sal lei. Aan die einde van die jaar ontvang die huis met die meeste punte die huistrofie – 'n groot eer. Ek hoop julle sal almal 'n aanwinst vir jul huise wees.

“Die Sorteerseremonie sal binne 'n paar minute voor die res van die skool begin. Ek stel voor dat julle julself netjies maak terwyl julle wag.”

Haar oë speel vir 'n oomblik oor Neville se mantel wat onder sy linker-

oor geknoop is en oor die kol op Ron se neus. Harry sukkel om sy hare plat te druk.

“Ek kom haal julle sodra ons gereed is,” sê professor McGonagall. “Moet asseblief nie raas nie.”

Sy verlaat die vertrek. Harry sluk.

“Presies hoe deel hulle ons in huise in?” vra hy vir Ron.

“’n Soort toets, dink ek. Fred het gesê dis hengse seer, maar ek dink hy’t net ’n grap gemaak.”

Harry se hart mis ’n slag. ’n Toets? Voor die hele skool? Maar hy ken nog geen towerspreuke nie – wat op aarde sal hy moet doen? Hy het glad nie so iets by hul aankoms verwag nie. Hy kyk benoud rond en sien dat al die ander net so verskrik soos hy lyk. Niemand praat baie nie, behalwe Hermien la Grange wat al die spreuke wat sy geleer het, baie vinnig opsê en wonder watter een sy gaan nodig kry. Harry probeer hard om nie na haar te luister nie. Hy was nog nooit meer senuagtig as nou nie, nie eens toe hy ’n brief van die skool af huis toe moes neem oor hy die onderwyser se pruik blou laat word het nie. Sy oë bly vasgenaël op die deur. Enige oomblik kan professor McGonagall instap en hom die verdoemnis in lei.

Toe gebeur iets wat hom amper ’n halwe meter hoog laat spring – verskeie van die mense agter hom gil.

“Wat de – ?”

Hy snak na asem. So ook die mense om hom. ’n Stuk of twintig spoke stroom eenvoudig deur die muur agter hulle. Hulle is pêrelwit en amper deurskynend en hulle gly deur die vertrek terwyl hulle met mekaar praat en skaars na die eerstejaars kyk. Dit klink of hulle stry. Een wat soos ’n vet klein monnikie lyk, sê: “Vergewe en vergeet, sê ek, ons behoort hom ’n tweede kans te gee –”

“My liewe Broeder, Nurks het al meer kanse gehad as wat hy verdien! Hy gee ons almal ’n slegte naam en hy’s nie eens regtig ’n spook nie – haai, wat maak julle hier?”

’n Spook in ’n plooiakraag en ’n spanbroek het die eerstejaars skielik opgemerk.

Niemand antwoord nie.

“Nuwe studente,” sê die Vet Monnik en glimlag vir hulle. “Gaan sorteer word, reken ek.”

’n Paar van die eerstejaars knik woordeloos.

“Hoop ek sien julle in Hoesenproes!” sê die Monnik. “My ou huis, weet julle.”

“Aanstap,” sê ’n skerp stem. “Die Sorteerseremonie gaan begin.”

Professor McGonagall is terug. Een vir een kom die spoke deur die oorkantste muur.

“Staan in ’n ry,” beveel professor McGonagall, “en stap agter my aan.”

Met bene wat skielik loodswaar geword het, gaan staan Harry in die ry agter 'n seun met vaalbruin hare. Ron is reg agter Harry. Hulle stap by die vertrek uit, terug oor die portaal en in by 'n stel dubbele deure wat na die Groot Saal lei.

Harry sou hom so 'n vreemde en luisterryke plek nooit kon voorstel nie. Dit word verlig deur duisende en duisende kerse wat in die lug bo vier lang tafels swewe. Hier sit die res van die studente. Die tafels is gedek met glinsterende goue borde en drinkbekers. Aan die bopunt van die saal is nog 'n lang tafel waar die onderwysers sit. Professor McGonagall lei die eerstejaars tot hier, sodat hulle in 'n lang ry met hul gesigte na die res van die studente staan, terwyl die onderwysers reg agter hulle sit. Die honderde gesigte wat na hulle staar, lyk soos bleek lanterns in die flikkerende kerslig. Hier en daar tussen die studente blink die spoke, mistig en silwer van kleur. Harry probeer die talle starende oë vermy en draai sy gesig boontoe. Hy sien 'n fluweelagtige swart plafon oortrek met sterre en hoor Hermien fluister, "Dis getoor om soos die sterre buite te lyk. Ek het daarvoor gelees in *Hogwarts, 'n Geskiedenis*."

Dis moeilik om te glo dat daar hoegenaamd 'n plafon is en dat die Groot Saal nie bloot bo oop is nie.

Harry kyk weer vinnig af toe professor McGonagall 'n vierpootbankie voor die eerstejaars neersit. Bo-op die bankie sit sy 'n gepunte towenaars-hoed. Die hoed is gelap en vertoing en verskriklik vuil. Tant Petunia sou dit beslis nie in haar huis toelaat nie.

Miskien moet ons 'n haas daaruit haal, dink Harry wildweg, of so iets. Hy sien dat almal in die saal nou na die hoed staar en hy hou dit ook fyn dop. Vir 'n paar sekondes is alles doodstil. Toe begin die hoed kriel. 'n Skeur by die rand gaan oop, soos 'n mond – en die hoed begin sing:

*"Jy dink dalk ek is oud en lelik,
Maar hoe dit ook al sy,
Ek eet myself so wraggies op,
As jy 'n vietser hoed kan kry.
Gooi weg die dophoede, aaklig swart,
Die keile, hoog en skraal.
Ek is Hogwarts se Sorteelhoed,
Ek gaan jou lot bepaal.
Daar is geen gedagtes in jou kop,
Wat Sorteelhoed nie kan lees nie,
So sit my sommer gou-gou op –
Dan kyk ek mooi waar jy moet wees.
Dalk is Griffindor jou tuiste,
Met die dapperes van hart,
Hul waagmoed en hul hoflikheid,*

*Plaas hul eenkant, apart.
Miskien hoort jy in Hoesenproes,
Regverdig en getrou,
Geduldig, lydsaam, eerlik,
Hulle sal handhaaf en bou.
Vir die flinkes van verstand,
Is daar wyse Raweklou,
Met geestigheid en met vernuf,
Smee hulle bande wat hou.
Miskien hoort jy in Slibberin,
Dalk is jou makkers hier,
Want hier is mense, slinks en slu,
Gewoond hul kry hul sin.
So vat die kans en sit my op!
Vir my kan jy beslis vertrou,
Ver en wyd sal my gedagtes loop,
Maar kop sal ek verseker hou.”*

Die hele saal klap hande toe die hoed klaar is met sy lied. Dit buig na elk van die vier tafels en toe is dit weer stil.

“Ons moet dus net die hoed opsit!” fluister Ron vir Harry. “Ek sal vir Fred vermoor, hy’t die hele tyd aangegaan oor ’n trol met wie ’n mens moet stoei!”

Harry glimlag floutjies. Ja, om ’n hoed op te sit, is stukke beter as om te moet toor, maar hy wens hy hoef dit nie voor al die kinders in die saal te doen nie. Die hoed vra nogal baie; Harry voel glad nie dapper of flink van verstand of enige so iets nie. As die hoed tog net van ’n huis gepraat het vir mense wat ’n bietjie naar op die maag is, dan het hy geweet dis waar hy gaan wees.

Nou staan professor McGonagall nader met ’n lang rol perkament in haar hand.

“As ek jou naam noem, kom vorentoe, sit die hoed op en gaan sit op die stoel,” sê sy. “Abbott, Hanna!”

’n Meisie met ’n pienk gesig en blonde vlegsels strompel vorentoe, gaan sit op die stoel en sit die hoed op, wat dadelik oor haar oë val. Vir ’n oomblik is dit stil –

“HOESENPROES!” roep die hoed uit.

Die tafel aan die regterkant juig en klap hande toe Hanna na die Hoesenproes-tafel stap. Harry sien hoe die spook van die Vet Monnik vrolik vir haar waai.

“Beyers, Susan!”

“HOESENPROES!” skree die hoed weer, en Susan skuifel weg om langs Hanna te gaan sit.

“Bouwer, Terrie!”

“RAWEKLOU!”

Hierdie keer klap die tafel tweede van links hande; verskeie lede van Raweklou staan op om Terrie se hand te skud toe hy by hulle aansluit.

“Brocklehurst, Mandy” gaan ook na Raweklou, maar “Braun, Hildeward” is die eerste een om by Griffindor aan te sluit en die tafel ver links ontplof met luide toejuiging; Harry sien hoe Ron se tweelingbroers voete stamp en fluit.

“Bukani, Margaret” gaan na Slibberin. Miskien is dit Harry se verbeelding na alles wat hy van Slibberin gehoor het, maar vir hom lyk hulle na ’n onplesierige spul.

Teen hierdie tyd voel hy regtig na. Hy onthou hoe dit was om vir spanne gekies te word tydens sportlesse by sy ou skool. Hy is altyd laaste gekies, nie omdat hy niks beteken het nie, maar omdat niemand wou hê Dudley moet dink dat hulle van hom hou nie.

“Finch-Fletchley, Justin!”

“HOESENPROES!”

Partykeer, so sien Harry, roep die hoed die naam van die huis dadelik uit, maar ander kere neem dit ’n tydjie om te besluit. “Floris, Septimus,” die seun met die vaalbruin hare wat langs hom sit, wag vir ’n volle minuut voor die hoed besluit dat hy in Griffindor hoort.

“La Grange, Hermien!”

Hermien hardloop omtrent vorentoe en plak die hoed gretig op haar kop.

“GRIFFINDOR!” skree die hoed en Ron kreun.

’n Vreeslike gedagte tref Harry, soos vreeslike gedagtes altyd maak wanneer jy op jou senuwees is. Wat as hy glad nie gekies word nie? Wat as hy net daar sit en sit met die hoed oor sy oë, tot professor McGonagall dit van sy kop af pluk en sê daar was beslis ’n fout en hy moet op die trein klim en maak dat hy wegkom?

Neville Loggerenberg, die seun wat aanmekeer sy padda verloor, val oor sy eie voete op pad stoel toe. Die hoed neem lank om te besluit. Toe dit uiteindelik “GRIFFINDOR!” skree, laat vat Neville soontoe met die hoed nog steeds op sy kop en hy moet, onder luide gelag, terugdraf om dit vir “Makabeni, Sam!” te gee.

Malfoy stap windmakerig vorentoe toe sy naam uitgeroep word, en sy wens word onmiddellik waar. Die hoed het skaars aan sy kop geraak of dit skreeu: “SLIBBERIN!”

Malfoy lyk baie in sy skik met homself toe hy na sy vriende Krabbe en Goliath toe stap.

Daar is nie meer baie mense oor nie.

“Moon” . . . “Niemand” . . . “Parkinson” . . . toe ’n tweeling “Patel” en “Patel” . . . toe “Petzel, Wolfgang” . . . en uiteindelik –

“Potter, Harry!”

Toe Harry vorentoe stap, vlam ’n gefluister sissend op in die saal.

“Het sy Potter gesê?”

“Die Harry Potter?”

Die laaste ding wat Harry sien voor die hoed oor sy oë sak, is die saal vol mense wat hul nekke amper verrek om te sien hoe hy lyk. Die volgende oomblik kyk hy vas in die hoed se swart binnekant. Hy wag.

“Hmm,” sê ’n klein stemmetjie in sy oor. “Moeilik. Baie moeilik. Genoeg moed, sien ek. Glad nie ’n slegte verstand nie. Daar is talent, o my goeiste, ja – en ’n wil om jouself te bewys, nou dis interessant . . . Waar sal ek jou sit?”

Harry klou die kante van die bankie styf vas en dink, Net nie Slibberin nie, nie Slibberin nie.

“Nie Slibberin nie, nè?” sê die stemmetjie. “Is jy seker? Jy is tot groot dinge in staat, weet jy, dis alles hier in jou kop en Slibberin sal jou help, dit ly geen twyfel nie – nee? Wel, as jy seker is – dan is dit GRIFFINDOR!”

Harry luister hoe die hoed die laaste woord uitskree vir die hele saal om te hoor. Hy haal die hoed af en stap ietwat bewerig na die Griffindor-tafel. Hy is so verlig dat hy nie in Slibberin beland het nie, hy kom nie eens agter dat hy die grootste toejuiging van almal kry nie. Percy die Prefek staan op en skud sy hand entoesiasties, terwyl die Weasley-tweeling hard skree, “Ons het Potter! Ons het Potter!” Harry gaan sit oorkant die spook in die plooiakraag wat hy vroeër die aand gesien het. Die spook klop hom op die arm en dit voel vir Harry of sy hele arm in ’n emmer yskoue water gedompel is.

Hy kan die Hooftafel nou behoorlik sien. By die punt naaste aan hom sit Hagrid. Hagrid vang sy oog en en hou sy duim op. Harry grinnik vir hom. En daar, in die middel van die Hooftafel, op ’n groot, goue stoel, sit Albus Dompeldorius. Harry herken hom dadelik aan die foto op die kaartjie wat hy in die Sjokoladepadde op die trein gekry het. Dompeldorius se silwer hare is die enigste ding in die vertrek wat net so helder soos die spoke blink. Harry sien ook vir professor Quirrell, die senuagtige jong man van Die Kokende Pot. Hy dra ’n yslike pers tulband en lyk baie komieklik.

Nou moet nog net drie mense gesorteer word. “Thiart, Lisa” kom by Raweklou in en toe is dit Ron se beurt. Teen hierdie tyd is hy ’n vaalgroen kleur. Harry kruis sy vingers onder die tafel en ’n sekonde later roep die hoed uit: “GRIFFINDOR!”

Harry klap hard saam met die res toe Ron in die stoel langs hom neerval.

“Mooi so, Ron, uitstekend,” sê Percy Weasley hoogdrawend bo-oor Harry, terwyl “Zabini, Blaise” ’n SLIBBERIN word. Professor McGonagall rol haar perkament op en neem die Sorteelhoed weg.

Harry kyk na sy leë, goue bord. Hy besef nou eers hoe honger hy is. Dit voel soos jare gelede dat hy die pampoentertjies geëet het.

Albus Dompeldorius kom op sy voete. Stralend kyk hy na die studente, sy arms wydoop, asof niks hom blyer kan maak as om hulle hier voor hom te sien nie.

“Welkom!” sê hy. “Welkom by ’n nuwe jaar in Hogwarts! Voor ons met ons banket begin, wil ek ’n paar woorde sê. En hier is hulle: Stommerik! Spekboude! Oorskiet! Knyp! Dankie, dankie!”

Hy gaan weer sit. Almal klap hande en juig. Harry weet nie of hy moet lag of huil nie.

“Is hy – ’n bietjie mal?” vra hy vir Percy.

“Mal?” sê Percy lughartig. “Hy’s ’n genie! Die beste towenaar in die wêreld! Maar hy is ’n bietjie mal, ja. Aartappels, Harry?”

Harry se mond val oop. Die skottels voor hom op die tafel is eensklaps gelaai met kos. Hy het nog nooit so ’n verskeidenheid geregte waarvan hy hou, op een tafel gesien nie: gebraaide beesvleis, geroosterde hoender, vark- en lamstjops, wors, spek en biefstuk, gekookte aartappels, gebraaide aartappels, tjijs, Yorkshirepoeding, ertjies, wortels, geurige souse, tamatiesous en, vir die een of ander eienaardige rede, pepermentsuiglekkers.

Dis nie dat die Dursleys Harry laat verhonger het nie, maar hy kon nooit soveel eet as wat hy wou nie. Dudley het altyd alles gevat wat Harry graag wou hê, al het hy ook naer geword daarvan. Harry laai sy bord vol met ’n bietjie van alles. Hy los net die pepermentsuiglekkers. Toe begin hy eet. Dit is heerlik.

“Dit lyk regtig smaaklik,” sê die spook in die plooi kraag ietwat bekaf, terwyl hy kyk hoe Harry sy biefstuk sny.

“Kan jy dan nie – ?”

“Ek het vierhonderd jaar laas iets geëet,” sê die spook. “Dis natuurlik nie nodig nie, maar ’n mens mis dit. Het ek myself voorgestel? Sir Nicolas de Mimsy-Porpington tot jou diens. Inwonende spook van die Griffindor-toring.”

“Ek weet van jou!” roep Ron skielik uit. “My broers het my vertel – jy is Nick-amper-sonder-kop!”

“Ek verkies dat mense my Sir Nicolas de Mimsy –” begin die spook stywerig, maar die vaalkopseun Septimus Floris val hom in die rede.

“Amper sonder kop? Hoe kan ’n mens *amper* sonder ’n kop wees?”

Sir Nicolas lyk nou besonder omgekrap, so asof die gesprek glad nie verloop soos wat hy graag wil hê nie.

“So,” sê hy geïrriteerd. Hy gryp sy linkeroor en trek. Sy hele kop swaai van sy nek af en val op sy skouer asof dit aan ’n skarnier hang. Iemand het duidelik probeer om sy kop af te kap, maar dit nie heeltemal reggekry nie. Nick-amper-sonder-kop lyk heel in sy skik met die verbysterde uit-

drukkings op die gesigte om hom. Hy wip sy kop terug op sy nek, hoës en sê, “So – die nuwe Griffindors! Ek hoop julle gaan ons help om vanjaar die huiskampioenskap te wen? Griffindor het nog nooit so lank laas gewen nie. Slibberin wen die afgelope ses jaar agter mekaar! Die Bloedige Baron is besig om ondraaglik verwaand te word – hy’s die Slibberin-spook.”

Harry kyk na die Slibberin-tafel en sien ’n aaklige grillerige spook daar sit. Hy het uitdrukkingloos starende oë, ’n afgeremde gesig en sy kleed is bevlek met silwer bloed. Hy sit reg langs Malfoy, wat glad nie in sy skik lyk met sy tafelmaat nie. Harry kry lekker toe hy dit sien.

“Hoekom is hy so vol bloed?” vra Septimus vol belangstelling.

“Ek het hom nog nooit gevra nie,” sê Nick-amper-sonder-kop diplomaties.

Toe almal soveel geëet het as wat hulle maar kan, verdwyn die oorskiet van die borde af sodat hulle net so skitterskoon as tevore is. ’n Oomblik later verskyn die nagereg. Blokke roomys in elke geur wat jy jou kan indink, appeltert, strooptert, sjokolade-éclairs en oliebolle met konfyt, koekstruif, aarbeie, jellie, ryspoeding . . .

Terwyl Harry ’n stuk strooptert in sy bord laai, draai die gesprek na hul onderskeie families.

“Ek is half-en-half,” sê Septimus. “My pa is ’n Moggel. My ma’t nie vir hom gesê sy’s ’n heks nie – eers na hulle getroud is. Bietjie van ’n nare skok vir hom.”

Die ander lag.

“Wat van jou, Neville?” vra Ron.

“Ag, my ouma het my grootgemaak en sy is ’n heks,” sê Neville, “maar die familie dink nog al die jare dat ek ’n Moggel is. My grootoom Algie het aanhou probeer om my skrik te maak sodat ek towerkunsies moet probeer doen – hy’t my eenkeer in die rivier gestamp, ek het amper verdrink – maar niks het gebeur tot ek agt was nie. Grootoom Algie het kom tee drink en hy’t my aan my enkels uit die boonste venster laat hang. Toe tant Enid vir hom ’n meringue gee, het hy my per ongeluk laat val. Gelukkig het ek gehop – deur die tuin en af in die pad. Almal was vreeslik bly, my ouma het gehuil so bly was sy. En julle moes hul gesigte gesien het toe ek hier plek kry – hulle’t gedink ek het nie genoeg toorkrag in my om hierheen te kan kom nie. Grootoom Algie was so in sy skik, hy’t die padda vir my gekoop.”

Aan Harry se ander kant is Percy Weasley en Hermien diep in gesprek oor klasse (“Ek hoop regtig die klasse begin sommer dadelik, daar is so baie om te leer. Ek stel veral belang in Transfigurasië, jy weet, om iets in iets anders te verander, ek weet dis veronderstel om baie moeilik te wees maar –”; “Julle sal met iets kleins begin, soos vuurhoutjies in spelde verander, daardie soort ding –”)

Harry, wat warm en slaperig begin voel, kyk weer op na die Hooftafel. Hagrid teug diep uit sy drinkbeker. Professor McGonagall gesels met professor Dompeldorius. Professor Quirrell, in sy verspote tulband, praat met 'n onderwyser met oliegerige swart hare, 'n haakneus en 'n gelerige vel.

Dit gebeur baie skielik. Die onderwyser met die haakneus staan verby Quirrell se tulband, reg in Harry se oë – en 'n skerp, warm pyn skiet deur die litteken op Harry se voorkop.

“Eina!” Harry klap sy hand teen sy kop.

“Wat gaan aan?” vra Percy.

“N-niks.”

Die pyn is net so skielik weg as wat dit gekom het. Dis swaarder om die gevoel af te skud wat hy uit die onderwyser se oë sien straal het – die gevoel dat hy absoluut niks van Harry hou nie.

“Wie praat daar met professor Quirrell?” vra Harry.

“O, jy ken dus reeds vir professor Quirrell? G'n wonder hy lyk so op sy senuwees nie. Dis professor Snerp! Hy doseer Towerdrankies, maar hy wil nie – almal weet hy is agter Quirrell se pos aan. Snerp weet verskriklik baie van die Donker Kunste af.”

Harry hou Snerp 'n rukkie lank dop, maar die onderwyser kyk nie weer na hom nie.

Uiteindelik verdwyn die nagereg ook en professor Dompeldorius kom weer op sy voete. Die hele saal word stil.

“Ahem – net nog 'n paar woorde nou dat julle iets te ete en te drinke gehad het. Daar is 'n paar begin-van-die-jaar-afkondigings wat ek moet maak.

“Eerstejaarstudente moet kennis neem dat die woud op die terrein verbode is vir alle studente. 'n Paar van die ouer studente kan ook maar luister.”

Professor Dompeldorius se glinsterende ogies flikker in die rigting van die Weasley-tweeling.

“Ek is ook deur mnr. Fillis, die opsigter, gevra om julle daaraan te herinner dat geen towerkunsies tussen klasse in die gange gedoen mag word nie.

“Die proewe vir die Kwiddiek-spanne sal in die tweede week van die kwartaal gehou word. Almal wat belang stel om vir hul huis te speel, moet Madame Hooch kontak.

“En laastens moet ek julle meedeel dat die gang op die derde verdieping hierdie jaar nie betree mag word nie, behalwe deur diegene wat graag 'n pynlike dood wil sterf.”

Harry lag, maar hy is een van net 'n hand vol.

“Hy's darem seker nie ernstig nie?” mompel hy teenoor Percy.

“Moet wees,” sê Percy en frons in Dompeldorius se rigting. “Dis snaaks. Gewoonlik gee hy 'n rede waarom ons iets nie mag doen nie – die

woud is vol gevaarlike diere, almal weet dit. Hy kan ten minste vir die prefekte sê!”

“En nou, voor almal bed toe gaan, laat ons die skoollied sing!” roep Dompeldorius uit. Harry let op dat die ander onderwysers se glimlagte stram begin word.

Dompeldorius gee ’n ligte rapsie met sy towerstaf, nes of hy ’n brommer van die punt af wil waai. ’n Lang goue lint vlieg uit die punt van die staf en vorm krullende woorde hoog bo die tafels.

“Elkeen kan sy of haar geliefkoosde wysie kies,” sê Dompeldorius. “Almal saam.”

Die hele skool sing uit volle bors:

“Hogwarts, Hogwarts, vratterige Hogwarts,

Leer ons alles wat ons moet weet.

Of ons nou dik of maer of bles is,

Of jonk met skurwe voete,

Ons koppe moet volgestop word,

Met interessante goete,

Want nou is ons breine leeg, vol lug,

Dooie vlieë en stukkies roet.

So, gee ons alles wat ons moet weet,

Sit alles terug wat ons vergeet!

Doen jou bes, Hogwarts, ons doen die res,

Ons sal leer tot ons breine verrot.”

Almal maak die lied op verskillende tye klaar. Teen die einde sing nog net die Weasley-tweeling op die maat van ’n stadige begrafnismars. Dompeldorius dirigeer die laaste paar reëls met sy towerstaf en toe hulle klaar is, is dit hy wat die hardste hande klap.

“Aa, musiek,” sê hy en vee oor sy oë. “’n Kuns verhewe bo alles wat ons hier doen! En nou – slaptyd. Weg is julle!”

Die eerstejaars van Griffindor volg Percy deur die kletsende mense-massa, uit by die Groot Saal en op met die marmertappe. Harry se bene voel weer soos lood, hierdie keer omdat hy moeg en versadig is. Hy is te vaak om verbaas te wees dat die mense in die portrette teen die mure vir mekaar fluister en na hulle wys toe hulle verbystap, of dat Percy hulle twee keer deur openinge agter skuifpaneel en muurbehangsels lei. Hulle klim nog trappe, gaap en sleep hul voete en Harry begin net wonder hoeveel verder hulle nog moet gaan, toe Percy skielik gaan staan.

’n Bondel kieres dryf in die lug voor hulle en toe Percy nader tree, slinger hulle hulself na hom.

“Nurks,” fluister Percy vir die eerstejaars. “’n Poltergeist.” Hy verhef sy stem. “Nurks – vertoon jouself.”

'n Dowwe, ongeskikte geluid is die enigste antwoord, baie soos wanneer die lug uit 'n ballon gelaat word.

“Wil jy hê ek moet die Bloedige Baron roep?”

Daar is 'n harde plofgeluid en 'n klein mannetjie met onnutsige donker ogies en 'n breë mond verskyn. Hy sweef kruisbeen deur die lug, met die kieries in sy hande.

“Oooooe!” sê hy en kekkellag. “Eerstejaartjies! Oe, pret!”

Uit die bloute duik hy op hulle af. Almal koes.

“Gaan weg, Nurks, of ek loop sê vir die Baron, en ek bedoel dit!” dreig Percy.

Nurks steek sy tong uit en verdwyn. Die kieries val op Neville se kop. Hulle hoor hoe Nurks lawaaierig wegskarrel en die wapenrustings in die verbygaan ratel.

“Julle moet lig loop vir Nurks,” sê Percy toe hulle verder stap. “Die Bloedige Baron is die enigste een wat hom kan beheer, hy luister nie eens vir ons prefekte nie. Hier is ons.”

Aan die punt van die gang hang 'n portret van 'n baie vet vrou in 'n pienk syrok.

“Wagwoord?” sê sy.

“Caput Draconis,” sê Percy en die portret swaai vorentoe sodat hulle die ronde opening daaragter kan sien. Almal klouter deur, behalwe Neville wat gehelp moet word. Sommer gou is hulle binne-in die Griffindor-geselskamer, 'n gesellige, ronde vertrek vol sagte gemakstoel.

Percy beduie aan die meisies watter deur na hul slaapsaal lei en wys die seuns waar hulle s'n is. Aan die bopunt van 'n wenteltrap – hulle moet in een van die torings wees – vind hulle uiteindelik hul slaapplekke: vyf hernelbeddens met dieprooi fluweelgordyne. Hul trommels is reeds daar. Te moeg om te praat, trek hulle hul pajamas aan en val in die bed.

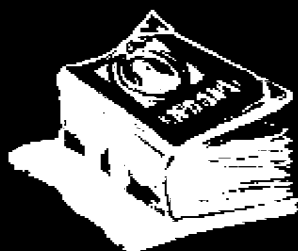
“Lekker kos, nè?” mompel Ron van agter die behangsels. “Gaan weg, Skille! Hy kou my lakens.”

Harry wil nog vir Ron vra of hy van die strooptert gehad het, maar hy raak feitlik onmiddellik aan die slaap.

Miskien het Harry te veel geëet, want hy het 'n baie snaakse droom. Hy dra professor Quirrell se tulband wat aanhou met hom praat en sê hy moet dadelik na Slibberin oorgaan, want dit is vir hom bestem. Hoe meer Harry vir die tulband sê dat hy nie in Slibberin wil wees nie, hoe swaarder word dit. Hy probeer dit afhaal, maar dit trek pynlik al stywer vas – en daar staan Malfoy en lag terwyl hy sukkel – en toe verander Malfoy in die onderwyser met die haakneus, Snerp, en sy lag word hoog en koud. Toe skielik flits daar 'n skerp groen lig en Harry skrik wakker, swetend en bewend.

Hy rol om en raak weer aan die slaap en toe hy die volgende oggend wakker word, kan hy die droom glad nie meer onthou nie.

CHAPTER EIGHT



THE POTIONS MASTER

There, look.”

“Where?”

“Next to the tall kid with the red hair.”

“Wearing the glasses?”

“Did you see his face?”

“Did you see his scar?”

Whispers followed Harry from the moment he left his dormitory the next day. People lining up outside classrooms stood on tiptoe to get a look at him, or doubled back to pass him in the corridors again, staring. Harry wished they wouldn't, because he was trying to concentrate on finding his way to classes.

There were a hundred and forty-two staircases at Hogwarts: wide, sweeping ones; narrow, rickety ones; some that led somewhere different on a Friday; some with a vanishing step halfway up that you had to remember to jump. Then there were doors that wouldn't open unless you asked politely, or tickled them in exactly the right place, and doors that weren't really doors at all, but solid walls just pretending. It was also very hard to remember where anything was, because it all seemed to move around a lot. The people in the portraits kept going to visit each other, and Harry was sure the coats of armor could walk.

The ghosts didn't help, either. It was always a nasty shock when one of them glided suddenly through a door you were trying to open. Nearly Headless Nick was always happy to point new Gryffindors in

the right direction, but Peeves the Poltergeist was worth two locked doors and a trick staircase if you met him when you were late for class. He would drop wastepaper baskets on your head, pull rugs from under your feet, pelt you with bits of chalk, or sneak up behind you, invisible, grab your nose, and screech, “GOT YOUR CONK!”

Even worse than Peeves, if that was possible, was the caretaker, Argus Filch. Harry and Ron managed to get on the wrong side of him on their very first morning. Filch found them trying to force their way through a door that unluckily turned out to be the entrance to the out-of-bounds corridor on the third floor. He wouldn't believe they were lost, was sure they were trying to break into it on purpose, and was threatening to lock them in the dungeons when they were rescued by Professor Quirrell, who was passing.

Filch owned a cat called Mrs. Norris, a scrawny, dust-colored creature with bulging, lamplike eyes just like Filch's. She patrolled the corridors alone. Break a rule in front of her, put just one toe out of line, and she'd whisk off for Filch, who'd appear, wheezing, two seconds later. Filch knew the secret passageways of the school better than anyone (except perhaps the Weasley twins) and could pop up as suddenly as any of the ghosts. The students all hated him, and it was the dearest ambition of many to give Mrs. Norris a good kick.

And then, once you had managed to find them, there were the classes themselves. There was a lot more to magic, as Harry quickly found out, than waving your wand and saying a few funny words.

They had to study the night skies through their telescopes every Wednesday at midnight and learn the names of different stars and the movements of the planets. Three times a week they went out to the

greenhouses behind the castle to study Herbology, with a dumpy little witch called Professor Sprout, where they learned how to take care of all the strange plants and fungi, and found out what they were used for.

Easily the most boring class was History of Magic, which was the only one taught by a ghost. Professor Binns had been very old indeed when he had fallen asleep in front of the staffroom fire and got up next morning to teach, leaving his body behind him. Binns droned on and on while they scribbled down names and dates, and got Emeric the Evil and Uric the Oddball mixed up.

Professor Flitwick, the Charms teacher, was a tiny little wizard who had to stand on a pile of books to see over his desk. At the start of their first class he took the roll call, and when he reached Harry's name he gave an excited squeak and toppled out of sight.

Professor McGonagall was again different. Harry had been quite right to think she wasn't a teacher to cross. Strict and clever, she gave them a talking-to the moment they sat down in her first class.

"Transfiguration is some of the most complex and dangerous magic you will learn at Hogwarts," she said. "Anyone messing around in my class will leave and not come back. You have been warned."

Then she changed her desk into a pig and back again. They were all very impressed and couldn't wait to get started, but soon realized they weren't going to be changing the furniture into animals for a long time. After taking a lot of complicated notes, they were each given a match and started trying to turn it into a needle. By the end of the lesson, only Hermione Granger had made any difference to her match; Professor McGonagall showed the class how it had gone all

silver and pointy and gave Hermione a rare smile.

The class everyone had really been looking forward to was Defense Against the Dark Arts, but Quirrell's lessons turned out to be a bit of a joke. His classroom smelled strongly of garlic, which everyone said was to ward off a vampire he'd met in Romania and was afraid would be coming back to get him one of these days. His turban, he told them, had been given to him by an African prince as a thank-you for getting rid of a troublesome zombie, but they weren't sure they believed this story. For one thing, when Seamus Finnigan asked eagerly to hear how Quirrell had fought off the zombie, Quirrell went pink and started talking about the weather; for another, they had noticed that a funny smell hung around the turban, and the Weasley twins insisted that it was stuffed full of garlic as well, so that Quirrell was protected wherever he went.

Harry was very relieved to find out that he wasn't miles behind everyone else. Lots of people had come from Muggle families and, like him, hadn't had any idea that they were witches and wizards. There was so much to learn that even people like Ron didn't have much of a head start.

Friday was an important day for Harry and Ron. They finally managed to find their way down to the Great Hall for breakfast without getting lost once.

"What have we got today?" Harry asked Ron as he poured sugar on his porridge.

"Double Potions with the Slytherins," said Ron. "Snape's Head of Slytherin House. They say he always favors them — we'll be able to see if it's true."

“Wish McGonagall favored us,” said Harry. Professor McGonagall was head of Gryffindor House, but it hadn’t stopped her from giving them a huge pile of homework the day before.

Just then, the mail arrived. Harry had gotten used to this by now, but it had given him a bit of a shock on the first morning, when about a hundred owls had suddenly streamed into the Great Hall during breakfast, circling the tables until they saw their owners, and dropping letters and packages onto their laps.

Hedwig hadn’t brought Harry anything so far. She sometimes flew in to nibble his ear and have a bit of toast before going off to sleep in the owlery with the other school owls. This morning, however, she fluttered down between the marmalade and the sugar bowl and dropped a note onto Harry’s plate. Harry tore it open at once. It said, in a very untidy scrawl:

Dear Harry,

I know you get Friday afternoons off, so would you like to come and have a cup of tea with me around three? I want to hear all about your first week. Send us an answer back with Hedwig.

Hagrid

Harry borrowed Ron’s quill, scribbled *Yes, please, see you later* on the back of the note, and sent Hedwig off again.

It was lucky that Harry had tea with Hagrid to look forward to, because the Potions lesson turned out to be the worst thing that had happened to him so far.

At the start-of-term banquet, Harry had gotten the idea that

Professor Snape disliked him. By the end of the first Potions lesson, he knew he'd been wrong. Snape didn't dislike Harry — he *hated* him.

Potions lessons took place down in one of the dungeons. It was colder here than up in the main castle, and would have been quite creepy enough without the pickled animals floating in glass jars all around the walls.

Snape, like Flitwick, started the class by taking the roll call, and like Flitwick, he paused at Harry's name.

“Ah, yes,” he said softly, “Harry Potter. Our new — *celebrity*.”

Draco Malfoy and his friends Crabbe and Goyle sniggered behind their hands. Snape finished calling the names and looked up at the class. His eyes were black like Hagrid's, but they had none of Hagrid's warmth. They were cold and empty and made you think of dark tunnels.

“You are here to learn the subtle science and exact art of potion-making,” he began. He spoke in barely more than a whisper, but they caught every word — like Professor McGonagall, Snape had the gift of keeping a class silent without effort. “As there is little foolish wand-waving here, many of you will hardly believe this is magic. I don't expect you will really understand the beauty of the softly simmering cauldron with its shimmering fumes, the delicate power of liquids that creep through human veins, bewitching the mind, ensnaring the senses. . . . I can teach you how to bottle fame, brew glory, even stopper death — if you aren't as big a bunch of dunderheads as I usually have to teach.”

More silence followed this little speech. Harry and Ron exchanged

looks with raised eyebrows. Hermione Granger was on the edge of her seat and looked desperate to start proving that she wasn't a dunderhead.

"Potter!" said Snape suddenly. "What would I get if I added powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood?"

Powdered root of what to an infusion of what? Harry glanced at Ron, who looked as stumped as he was; Hermione's hand had shot into the air.

"I don't know, sir," said Harry.

Snape's lips curled into a sneer.

"Tut, tut — fame clearly isn't everything."

He ignored Hermione's hand.

"Let's try again. Potter, where would you look if I told you to find me a bezoar?"

Hermione stretched her hand as high into the air as it would go without her leaving her seat, but Harry didn't have the faintest idea what a bezoar was. He tried not to look at Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle, who were shaking with laughter.

"I don't know, sir."

"Thought you wouldn't open a book before coming, eh, Potter?"

Harry forced himself to keep looking straight into those cold eyes. He *had* looked through his books at the Dursleys', but did Snape expect him to remember everything in *One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi*?

Snape was still ignoring Hermione's quivering hand.

"What is the difference, Potter, between monkshood and wolfsbane?"

At this, Hermione stood up, her hand stretching toward the dungeon ceiling.

“I don’t know,” said Harry quietly. “I think Hermione does, though, why don’t you try her?”

A few people laughed; Harry caught Seamus’s eye, and Seamus winked. Snape, however, was not pleased.

“Sit down,” he snapped at Hermione. “For your information, Potter, asphodel and wormwood make a sleeping potion so powerful it is known as the Draught of Living Death. A bezoar is a stone taken from the stomach of a goat and it will save you from most poisons. As for monkshood and wolfsbane, they are the same plant, which also goes by the name of aconite. Well? Why aren’t you all copying that down?”

There was a sudden rummaging for quills and parchment. Over the noise, Snape said, “And a point will be taken from Gryffindor House for your cheek, Potter.”

Things didn’t improve for the Gryffindors as the Potions lesson continued. Snape put them all into pairs and set them to mixing up a simple potion to cure boils. He swept around in his long black cloak, watching them weigh dried nettles and crush snake fangs, criticizing almost everyone except Malfoy, whom he seemed to like. He was just telling everyone to look at the perfect way Malfoy had stewed his horned slugs when clouds of acid green smoke and a loud hissing filled the dungeon. Neville had somehow managed to melt Seamus’s cauldron into a twisted blob, and their potion was seeping across the stone floor, burning holes in people’s shoes. Within seconds, the whole class was standing on their stools while Neville, who had

been drenched in the potion when the cauldron collapsed, moaned in pain as angry red boils sprang up all over his arms and legs.

“Idiot boy!” snarled Snape, clearing the spilled potion away with one wave of his wand. “I suppose you added the porcupine quills before taking the cauldron off the fire?”

Neville whimpered as boils started to pop up all over his nose.

“Take him up to the hospital wing,” Snape spat at Seamus. Then he rounded on Harry and Ron, who had been working next to Neville.

“You — Potter — why didn’t you tell him not to add the quills? Thought he’d make you look good if he got it wrong, did you? That’s another point you’ve lost for Gryffindor.”

This was so unfair that Harry opened his mouth to argue, but Ron kicked him behind their cauldron.

“Don’t push it,” he muttered, “I’ve heard Snape can turn very nasty.”

As they climbed the steps out of the dungeon an hour later, Harry’s mind was racing and his spirits were low. He’d lost two points for Gryffindor in his very first week — *why* did Snape hate him so much?

“Cheer up,” said Ron, “Snape’s always taking points off Fred and George. Can I come and meet Hagrid with you?”

At five to three they left the castle and made their way across the grounds. Hagrid lived in a small wooden house on the edge of the forbidden forest. A crossbow and a pair of galoshes were outside the front door.

When Harry knocked they heard a frantic scrabbling from inside and several booming barks. Then Hagrid’s voice rang out, saying,

“*Back, Fang — back.*”

Hagrid’s big, hairy face appeared in the crack as he pulled the door open.

“Hang on,” he said. “*Back, Fang.*”

He let them in, struggling to keep a hold on the collar of an enormous black boarhound.

There was only one room inside. Hams and pheasants were hanging from the ceiling, a copper kettle was boiling on the open fire, and in the corner stood a massive bed with a patchwork quilt over it.

“Make yerselves at home,” said Hagrid, letting go of Fang, who bounded straight at Ron and started licking his ears. Like Hagrid, Fang was clearly not as fierce as he looked.

“This is Ron,” Harry told Hagrid, who was pouring boiling water into a large teapot and putting rock cakes onto a plate.

“Another Weasley, eh?” said Hagrid, glancing at Ron’s freckles. “I spent half me life chasin’ yer twin brothers away from the forest.”

The rock cakes were shapeless lumps with raisins that almost broke their teeth, but Harry and Ron pretended to be enjoying them as they told Hagrid all about their first lessons. Fang rested his head on Harry’s knee and drooled all over his robes.

Harry and Ron were delighted to hear Hagrid call Filch “that old git.”

“An’ as fer that cat, Mrs. Norris, I’d like ter introduce her to Fang sometime. D’yeh know, every time I go up ter the school, she follows me everywhere? Can’t get rid of her — Filch puts her up to it.”

Harry told Hagrid about Snape’s lesson. Hagrid, like Ron, told Harry not to worry about it, that Snape liked hardly any of the

students.

“But he seemed to really *hate* me.”

“Rubbish!” said Hagrid. “Why should he?”

Yet Harry couldn’t help thinking that Hagrid didn’t quite meet his eyes when he said that.

“How’s yer brother Charlie?” Hagrid asked Ron. “I liked him a lot — great with animals.”

Harry wondered if Hagrid had changed the subject on purpose. While Ron told Hagrid all about Charlie’s work with dragons, Harry picked up a piece of paper that was lying on the table under the tea cozy. It was a cutting from the *Daily Prophet*:

GRINGOTTS BREAK-IN LATEST

Investigations continue into the break-in at Gringotts on 31 July, widely believed to be the work of Dark wizards or witches unknown.

Gringotts goblins today insisted that nothing had been taken. The vault that was searched had in fact been emptied the same day.

“But we’re not telling you what was in there, so keep your noses out if you know what’s good for you,” said a Gringotts spokesgoblin this afternoon.

Harry remembered Ron telling him on the train that someone had tried to rob Gringotts, but Ron hadn’t mentioned the date.

“Hagrid!” said Harry, “that Gringotts break-in happened on my birthday! It might’ve been happening while we were there!”

There was no doubt about it, Hagrid definitely didn't meet Harry's eyes this time. He grunted and offered him another rock cake. Harry read the story again. *The vault that was searched had in fact been emptied earlier that same day.* Hagrid had emptied vault seven hundred and thirteen, if you could call it emptying, taking out that grubby little package. Had that been what the thieves were looking for?

As Harry and Ron walked back to the castle for dinner, their pockets weighed down with rock cakes they'd been too polite to refuse, Harry thought that none of the lessons he'd had so far had given him as much to think about as tea with Hagrid. Had Hagrid collected that package just in time? Where was it now? And did Hagrid know something about Snape that he didn't want to tell Harry?

Die Meester van Towerdrankies

“Daar, kyk.”

“Waar?”

“Langs die lang kind met die rooi hare.”

“Wat bril dra?”

“Het jy sy gesig gesien?”

“Het jy die litteken gesien?”

Die oomblik toe Harry daardie eerste oggend die slaapsaal verlaat, begin die fluisterstemme. Mense staan tou buite die klaskamers en strek op hul tone om hom te kan sien. Hulle hardloop terug in die gange om weer na hom te staar. Harry wens hulle wil nie, want hy probeer konsentreer om sy pad klas toe te kry.

Daar is honderd-twee-en-veertig stelle trappe in Hogwarts: sierlike, breë trappe; smal, lendelam trappe; trappe wat op Vrydae iewers heel anders gaan; hier en daar is een waarvan ’n treetjie ewe skielik verdwyn sodat jy moet onthou om te spring. Daar is deure wat nie oopgaan nie, behalwe as jy baie beleef vra, of hulle op presies die regte plek kielie, en daar is deure wat glad nie deure is nie, maar soliede mure wat net maak of hulle deure is. Dis moeilik om te onthou waar alles is, want dis of alles die hele tyd rondbeweeg. Die mense in die portrette kuier gedurig by mekaar en Harry is seker dat die wapenrustings kan loop.

Die spoke is ook glad nie behulpsaam nie. Dis altyd ’n nare skok as een van hulle skielik dwarsdeur die deur, wat jy sukkel om oop te maak, gly. Nick-amper-sonder-kop is altyd bereid om die nuwe Griffindor-lede die pad te wys, maar Nurks, die Poltergeist, is twee geslote deure en ’n stel kultrappe werd wanneer jy laat is vir klas. Hy gooi snippermandjies op jou kop, trek matte onder jou voete uit, peper jou met stukkies kryt of sluip van agter op jou af, onsigbaar, gryp jou aan die neus en skreeu: “HET JOU SNAWEL!”

Erger as Nurks, as dit moontlik is, is die opsigter, Argus Fillis. Sommer op die heel eerste oggend is Harry en Ron al in die moeilikheid by hom. Fillis sien toe hulle ’n deur probeer oopdwing, wat ongelukkig al die tyd die ingang na die verbode gang op die derde verdieping is. Fillis weier om te glo

dat hulle verdwaal het. Hy is daarvan oortuig dat hulle aspris probeer inbreek het en dreig om hulle in 'n ondergrondse kerker op te sluit. Gelukkig word hulle gered deur professor Quirrell wat op daardie oomblik verbystap.

Fillis het 'n kat met die naam mev. Norris, 'n uitgeteerde, vaal gedierte met uitpeuloë soos gloeilampe, baie soos haar baas s'n. Sy patrolleer die gange op haar eie. As jy 'n reël oortree, as jy net een toon verkeerd neersit, dan glip sy weg na Fillis toe wat binne 'n japtrap daar is, al fluitend en blasend. Fillis ken die skool se geheime gange beter as enigiemand anders (behalwe miskien die Weasley-tweeling) en hy kan net so onverwags soos een van die spoke iewers opduik. Al die studente haat hom en amper almal het 'n brandende begeerte om mev. Norris onder die stert te skop.

As jy uiteindelik jou klaskamer gekry het, dan is daar die lesse. Daar is veel meer aan toor as wat Harry gedink het. Jy kan nie net jou towerstaffie swaai en 'n paar snaakse woorde sê nie.

Elke Woensdag teen middernag bestudeer hulle die hemelruim deur hul teleskope en leer die name van verskillende sterre en die bewegings van die planete. Drie keer per week gaan hulle na die kweekhuise agter die kasteel vir Herbologie by 'n vet heksie met die naam van professor Spruit. Hier leer hulle hoe om al die eenaardige plante en paddastoele te versorg en waarvoor hulle almal gebruik word.

Maklik die verveligste vak is Die Geskiedenis van Toordery, die enigste vak wat deur 'n spook gegee word. Professor Binns was baie oud toe hy in die personeelkamer voor die vuur aan die slaap geraak het. Toe hy die volgende oggend wakker word en klas toe gaan, het sy lyf agtergebly. Binns dreun aan en aan terwyl hulle name en datums neerskryf en Emerick die Bose en Uric die Koddige heeltemal deurmekaar kry.

Professor Flickerpitt, die onderwyser vir Towerspreuke, is 'n piepklein towenaarjie wat op 'n stapel boeke moet staan om oor die tafel te kan sien. Aan die begin van hul eerste les roep hy al die name uit. Toe hy by Harry se naam kom, los hy 'n opgewonde kreet en tuimel bo van die hoop boeke af.

Professor McGonagall is anders. Harry was reg toe hy gedink het sy is nie iemand om mee te sukkel nie. Sy is streng en slim en lees hulle be hoorlik die leviete voor die eerste keer dat hulle by haar klas instap.

“Transfigurasië is van die mees komplekse en gevaarlike towerwerk wat julle in Hogwarts gaan leer,” sê sy. “Enigiemand wat my klas probeer ontwig, sal hier uitstap en nooit weer terugkom nie. Julle is gewaarsku.”

Toe verander sy haar tafel in 'n vark en weer terug. Almal is baie beïndruk en kan nie wag om te begin nie. Hulle besef egter gou dat dit lank gaan neem voor hulle meubels in diere sal kan verander. Nadat hulle 'n klomp ingewikkelde notas afgeneem het, kry elkeen 'n vuurhoutjie wat hulle in 'n naald moet probeer verander. Teen die einde van die les lyk net Hermien la Grange se vuurhoutjie enigins anders. Professor Mc-

Gonagall wys vir die klas dat dit silwer geword het met 'n skerp punt en sy glimlag sowaar vir Hermien.

Die klas waarna almal uitsien, is Verdediging Teen die Donker Kunste, maar Quirrell se les is 'n bietjie van 'n grap. Sy klaskamer ruik skerp na knoffel en almal sê dis om 'n vampier wat hy in Roemenië ontmoet het, af te weer. Hy is glo bang dat die vampier hom een van die dae gaan kom haal. Sy tulband, so sê hy, is aan hom gegee deur 'n prins in Afrika, uit dankbaarheid omdat hy 'n lastige zombie weggejaag het, maar hulle is nie seker of hulle hom kan glo nie. Toe Septimus Floris byvoorbeeld wou weet hoe Quirrell nou eintlik die zombie verslaan het, het Quirrell pienk gebloos en oor die weer begin praat. Die tulband ruik snaaks en die Weasley-tweeling reken Quirrell het die tulband ook vol knoffel gestop, sodat hy beskerm sal wees waar hy ook al mag gaan.

Harry is baie verlig om te sien dat hy nie myle agter die ander is nie. Baie van die mense kom uit Moggel-families en het, net soos hy, nie 'n idee gehad dat hulle hekse en towenaars is nie. Daar is soveel om te leer dat selfs iemand soos Ron nie veel van 'n voorsprong het nie.

Vrydag is 'n belangrike dag vir Harry en Ron. Hulle slaag uiteindelik daarin om hul pad na die Groot Saal te kry vir ontbyt, sonder dat hulle een keer verdwaal.

“Wat het ons vandag?” vra Harry vir Ron terwyl hy suiker oor sy pap gooi.

“Dubbele Towerdrankies saam met Slibberin,” sê Ron. “Snerp is Hoof van Huis Slibberin. Almal sê hy trek hulle altyd voor – ons sal gou agterkom of dit waar is.”

“Wens McGonagall wil ons voortrek,” sê Harry. Professor McGonagall is Hoof van Huis Griffindor, maar dit keer nie dat sy vir hulle stapels huiswerk gee nie.

Net toe kom die pos. Harry is nou al gewoond hieraan, hoewel hy die eerste dag geskrik het toe omtrent honderd uile skielik by die Groot Saal ingestroom het. Hulle het om die tafels gesirkel, tot hulle hul mense gesien het en hul briewe en pakkies op hul skote laat val het.

Tot dusver het Hedwig nog niks vir Harry gebring nie. Sy vlieg soms in en kom knibbel aan sy oor of aan 'n stukkie roosterbrood voor sy saam met die ander uile in die uilhuis gaan slaap. Vanoggend fladder sy egter rond tussen die marmelade en die suikerpot, en laat val 'n nota in Harry se skoot. Harry skeur dit dadelik oop.

Liewe Harry, staan daar in baie slordige letters,

Ek weet jy't Vrydagmiddae af, dus wat van 'n koppie tee sê so teen drie-uur se kant? Ek wil alles oor jou eerste week hoor. Stuur 'n antwoord saam met Hedwig.

Hagrid.

Harry leen Ron se veerpen, krap “Ja dankie, sien jou later” agterop die papier en stuur Hedwig weg.

Dis 'n geluk dat Harry tee met Hagrid het om na uit te sien, want die les in Towerdrankies is net mooi die slegste ding wat nog met hom gebeur het.

Op die banket het Harry die gevoel gekry dat professor Snerp nie van hom hou nie. Teen die einde van die eerste Towerdrankie-les weet hy dat hy verkeerd was. Dis nie dat Snerp nie van hom hou nie – hy *haat* hom.

Snerp se klasse word in een van die ondergrondse kerkers gehou. Dit is kouer hier as bo in die hoofkasteel en is heeltemal grillerig genoeg, selfs sonder die gepekelde diere wat in glasflessies teen die mure hang.

Net soos Flickerpitt begin Snerp sy klas met die neem van die register en soos Flickerpitt stop hy by Harry se naam.

“A, ja,” sê hy onderlangs, “Harry Potter. Ons nuwe – *ster*.”

Draco Malfoy en sy vriende, Krabbe en Goliat, giggel agter hul hande. Snerp maak die register klaar en kyk op na die klas. Sy oë is net so swart soos Hagrid s'n, maar hulle het niks van Hagrid se warmte nie. Hulle is koud en leeg en herinner 'n mens aan donker tonnells.

“Julle is hier vir die subtiële wetenskap en presiese kuns in die maak van towerdrankies,” begin hy. Hy fluister as hy praat, maar hulle hoor elke woord – soos professor McGonagall, het Snerp die gawe om die klas sonder moeite doodstil te hou. “Aangesien hier min geswaai van towerstawwe is, sal baie van julle skaars kan glo dat dit toordery is. Ek verwag nie dat julle die skoonheid sal verstaan van 'n hekseketel wat saggies prut en glimmerende walms die lug instuur nie, of die delikate mag van vloei-stowwe wat deur die mens se are kruip en sy brein betower en sy sinne verstrik nie . . . Ek sou julle kon leer hoe om roem te bottel, glorie te brou en selfs die dood in te lê – as julle nie net so 'n spul onnosele domore is soos al die ander vir wie ek moet klas gee nie.”

'n Lang stilte volg op sy toesprake. Harry en Ron lig hul wenkbroue en loer vir mekaar. Hermien la Grange sit op die punt van haar bank en lyk besonder gretig om te begin bewys dat sy nie 'n onnosele domoor is nie.

“Potter!” sê Snerp skielik. “Wat sal gebeur as ek verpoeierde wortel van daglelie by 'n oplossing van gemaalde wildeals voeg?”

Verpoeierde wortel van wat by 'n oplossing van wat? Harry staar na Ron wat net so deur die wind as hy lyk. Hermien se hand skiet die lug in.

“Ek weet nie, meneer,” sê Harry.

Snerp se lippe krul in 'n hoonlag.

“T-t – roem is duidelik nie alles nie.”

Hy ignoreer Hermien se hand.

“Kom ons probeer weer. Potter, waar sal jy soek as ek vra dat jy 'n besoar vir my moet bring?”

Nou steek Hermien haar hand so hoog die lug in as moontlik, sonder om uit haar sitplek op te staan, maar Harry het nie die vaagste benul wat 'n besoar is nie. Hy probeer om nie na Malfoy, Krabbe en Goliath, wat skud van die lag, te kyk nie.

“Ek weet nie, meneer.”

“Gedink jy hoef nie 'n boek oop te maak voor jy hierheen kom nie, nè, Potter?”

Harry dwing homself om reguit in die koue oë te kyk. Hy het na sy boeke gekyk toe hy nog by die Dursleys was, maar hoe kan Snerp verwag dat hy alles in *Eenhonderd Magiese Paddastoel en -Kruie* moet onthou?

Snerp ignoreer steeds Hermien se bewende hand.

“Wat is die verskil, Potter, tussen wolwekruid en wolfswortel?”

Nou staan Hermien op, haar hand uitgestrek na die kerkerplafon.

“Ek weet nie,” sê Harry saggies, “maar dit lyk of Hermien weet. Hoe kom vra u nie vir haar nie?”

'n Paar van die mense lag. Harry sien dat Septimus vir hom kyk en knipoog. Snerp is glad nie in sy skik nie.

“Sit,” sê hy kwaai vir Hermien. “Vir jou inligting, Potter, daglelie en wildeals maak 'n slaapmiddel, so kragtig, dit word die Drankie van die Lewende Dood genoem. 'n Besoar is 'n steen wat uit die maag van 'n bok kom en wat jou teen die meeste gifstowwe kan beskerm. Wolfskruid en wolfswortel is een en dieselfde plant, ook bekend as akoniet. Wel? Waarom skryf jy dit nie neer nie?”

Daar is 'n skielike gevroetel vir veerpenne en perkament. Bo-oor die geraas kom Snerp se stem, “'n Punt sal van Griffindor afgetrek word vir parmantigheid, Potter.”

Soos die les vorder, word sake nie beter vir Griffindor nie. Snerp deel almal op in pare en laat hulle 'n eenvoudige drankie meng om pitswere mee te behandel. Hy swiep rond in sy lang, swart gewaad, kyk hoe hulle die gedroogde brandnetels en verpoeierde slangtande afmeet en kritiseer feitlik almal, behalwe Malfoy, van wie hy skynbaar hou. Hy is net besig om almal te vertel hoe perfek Malfoy sy slakke gestowe het, toe borrels suurgroen rook en 'n harde gesis die kerker vul. Op die een of ander manier het Neville dit reggekry om Septimus se hekseketel in 'n verwronge klont te laat smelt. Hul towermiddel sypel oor die vloer en brand gate in mense se skoene. Binne 'n oogwenk staan die hele klas op hul banke, terwyl Neville, wat deurweek is met die towermiddel toe die hekseketel die gees gegee het, skreeu van die pyn. Lelike, rooi swere bars oor sy arms en bene uit.

“Idioot!” snou Snerp hom toe, terwyl hy die gemorste vloeistof laat verdwyn met een beweging van sy towerstaf. “Jy't natuurlik die yster-varkpenne ingegooi voor jy die hekseketel van die vuur af gehaal het?”

Neville kerm terwyl bloedvinte oral op sy neus verskyn.

“Neem hom na die siekeboeg,” spoeg Snerp in Septimus se rigting. Dan draai hy na Harry en Ron wat langs Neville werk.

“Jy – Potter – hoekom sê jy nie vir hom hy moenie die penne byvoeg nie? Gedink jy sal goed lyk as hy ’n fout maak, nie waar nie? Dus verloor jy nog ’n punt vir Griffindor.”

Dis so onregverdig dat Harry sy mond oopmaak om teen te stribbel, maar Ron skop hom van agter hul hekseketel.

“Bly liewer stil,” mompel hy, “ek het gehoor Snerp kan baie gemeen raak.”

Toe hulle ’n uur later teen die trappe van die kerker uitstap, kolk Harry se brein en voel hy lelik bedruk. In die heel eerste week het hy twee punte vir Griffindor verloor – hoekom haat Snerp hom so?

“Komaan, ruk jou reg,” sê Ron, “Snerp trek gedurig punte af vir Fred en George. Kan ek saam met jou na Hagrid toe gaan?”

Teen vyf voor drie verlaat hulle die kasteel en stap oor die terrein. Hagrid woon in ’n klein houthut op die rand van die verbode woud. Net buite die voordeur staan ’n kruisboog en ’n paar waterstewels.

Toe Harry klop, hoor hulle ’n woeste geblaf en ’n wilde gekrap van binne die hut. Toe weergalm Hagrid se stem, “Af, Tande – af.”

Hagrid se groot, harige gesig verskyn in die skreef toe hy die deur oopmaak.

“Wag net,” sê hy. “Af, Tande.”

Hy laat hulle in, terwyl hy sukkel om ’n enorme swart beerhond aan sy halsband terug te hou.

Die hut bestaan uit net een vertrek. Groot hamme en fisante hang van die plafon, ’n koperketel prut op die oop vuur en in die hoek staan ’n massiewe bed met ’n lappieskombers oor.

“Maak julle tuis,” sê Hagrid. Hy laat Tande gaan, wat reguit op Ron afpyl en sy ore lek. Soos Hagrid is Tande duidelik nie so kwaai soos wat hy lyk nie.

“Dit is Ron,” sê Harry vir Hagrid, wat besig is om kookwater in ’n groot teepot te skink en rotskoekies op ’n bord te pak.

“Nog ’n Weasley, of hoe?” Hagrid kyk na Ron se sproete. “Vir goed die helfte van my lewe jaag ek al jou tweelingbroers van die woud af weg.”

Hulle byt amper hul tande uit op die rotskoekies, maar Harry en Ron maak asof dit lekker smaak en vertel vir Hagrid alles wat tydens hul eerste lesse gebeur het. Tande rus sy kop op Harry se knie en kwyl oor sy kleed.

Harry en Ron is in hul skik toe hulle hoor dat Hagrid van Fillis as “daardie ou bok” praat.

“En daai kat, mev. Norris. Ek sal haar graag aan Tande wil voorstel. Weet julle wat, elke keer dat ek skool toe gaan, loop sy al agter my aan. Kan haar nie afskud nie – dis Fillis wat haar opsteek.”

Harry vertel vir Hagrid alles oor Snerp se klas. Net soos Ron sê Hagrid dat Harry hom nie moet bekommer nie, dat Snerp amper van nie een van die studente hou nie.

“Maar dis of hy my *haat*.”

“Twak!” sê Hagrid. “Hoekom sal hy?”

Tog is dit vir Harry of Hagrid hom nie heeltemal in die oë kan kyk toe hy dit sê nie.

“Hoe gaan dit met jou broer Charlie?” vra Hagrid vir Ron. “Ek het baie van hom gehou – wonderlik met diere.”

Harry wonder of Hagrid die onderwerp aspris verander het. Terwyl Ron alles oor Charlie se werk met drake vertel, tel Harry die koerantknipsel op wat op die tafel onder die teemus lê. Dit kom uit *Die Daaglikse Profeet*:

JONGSTE NUUS OOR INBRAAK TE EDELGOLT

Ondersoek na die inbraak te Edulgolt op 31 Julie duur voort. Daar word algemeen aanvaar dat onbekende Donker towenaars of hekse verantwoordelik gehou kan word.

Die gnome by Edulgolt het vandag bevestig dat niks gesteel is nie. Die betrokke kluis is juis vroeër die dag leeggemaak.

“Ons gaan nie sê wat daarin was nie, so hou jul neuse daar uit as julle weet wat goed is vir julle,” het ’n segspersoon vir Edulgolt gesê.

Harry onthou dat Ron hom op die trein vertel het dat iemand Edulgolt probeer beroof het, maar Ron het nie die datum genoem nie.

“Hagrid!” sê Harry, “die inbraak by Edulgolt was op my verjaardag! Dalk het dit gebeur terwyl ons daar was!”

Hierdie keer is daar geen twyfel nie. Hagrid vermy Harry se oë beslis. Hy snork en bied hom nog ’n rotskoekie aan. Weer lees Harry die berig. *Die betrokke kluis is juis vroeër die dag leeggemaak.* Hagrid het kluis nommer sewehonderd-en-dertien leeggemaak, as ’n mens dit leegmaak kan noem wanneer jy net ’n smerige pakkie uithaal. Was dit dan wat die diewe wou hê?

Terwyl Harry en Ron terugstap kasteel toe vir aandete, hul sakke swaar van die rotskoekies wat hulle te beleef was om te weier, dink Harry dat nie een van die lesse wat hy sover gehad het, hom soveel gegee het om oor na te dink as die teedrinkery saam met Hagrid nie. Het Hagrid die pakkie net betyds gaan haal? Waar is dit nou? En weet Hagrid iets oor Snerp wat hy nie vir Harry wil sê nie?

CHAPTER NINE



THE MIDNIGHT DUEL

Harry had never believed he would meet a boy he hated more than Dudley, but that was before he met Draco Malfoy. Still, first-year Gryffindors only had Potions with the Slytherins, so they didn't have to put up with Malfoy much. Or at least, they didn't until they spotted a notice pinned up in the Gryffindor common room that made them all groan. Flying lessons would be starting on Thursday — and Gryffindor and Slytherin would be learning together.

“Typical,” said Harry darkly. “Just what I always wanted. To make a fool of myself on a broomstick in front of Malfoy.”

He had been looking forward to learning to fly more than anything else.

“You don't know that you'll make a fool of yourself,” said Ron reasonably. “Anyway, I know Malfoy's always going on about how good he is at Quidditch, but I bet that's all talk.”

Malfoy certainly did talk about flying a lot. He complained loudly about first years never getting on the House Quidditch teams and told long, boastful stories that always seemed to end with him narrowly escaping Muggles in helicopters. He wasn't the only one, though: the way Seamus Finnigan told it, he'd spent most of his childhood zooming around the countryside on his broomstick. Even Ron would tell anyone who'd listen about the time he'd almost hit a hang glider on Charlie's old broom. Everyone from wizarding families talked about Quidditch constantly. Ron had already had a big argument with Dean Thomas, who shared their dormitory, about soccer. Ron

couldn't see what was exciting about a game with only one ball where no one was allowed to fly. Harry had caught Ron prodding Dean's poster of West Ham soccer team, trying to make the players move.

Neville had never been on a broomstick in his life, because his grandmother had never let him near one. Privately, Harry felt she'd had good reason, because Neville managed to have an extraordinary number of accidents even with both feet on the ground.

Hermione Granger was almost as nervous about flying as Neville was. This was something you couldn't learn by heart out of a book — not that she hadn't tried. At breakfast on Thursday she bored them all stupid with flying tips she'd gotten out of a library book called *Quidditch Through the Ages*. Neville was hanging on to her every word, desperate for anything that might help him hang on to his broomstick later, but everybody else was very pleased when Hermione's lecture was interrupted by the arrival of the mail.

Harry hadn't had a single letter since Hagrid's note, something that Malfoy had been quick to notice, of course. Malfoy's eagle owl was always bringing him packages of sweets from home, which he opened gloatingly at the Slytherin table.

A barn owl brought Neville a small package from his grandmother. He opened it excitedly and showed them a glass ball the size of a large marble, which seemed to be full of white smoke.

"It's a Remembrall!" he explained. "Gran knows I forget things — this tells you if there's something you've forgotten to do. Look, you hold it tight like this and if it turns red — oh . . ." His face fell, because the Remembrall had suddenly glowed scarlet, ". . . you've

forgotten something . . .”

Neville was trying to remember what he'd forgotten when Draco Malfoy, who was passing the Gryffindor table, snatched the Remembrall out of his hand.

Harry and Ron jumped to their feet. They were half hoping for a reason to fight Malfoy, but Professor McGonagall, who could spot trouble quicker than any teacher in the school, was there in a flash.

“What’s going on?”

“Malfoy’s got my Remembrall, Professor.”

Scowling, Malfoy quickly dropped the Remembrall back on the table.

“Just looking,” he said, and he sloped away with Crabbe and Goyle behind him.

At three-thirty that afternoon, Harry, Ron, and the other Gryffindors hurried down the front steps onto the grounds for their first flying lesson. It was a clear, breezy day, and the grass rippled under their feet as they marched down the sloping lawns toward a smooth, flat lawn on the opposite side of the grounds to the forbidden forest, whose trees were swaying darkly in the distance.

The Slytherins were already there, and so were twenty broomsticks lying in neat lines on the ground. Harry had heard Fred and George Weasley complain about the school brooms, saying that some of them started to vibrate if you flew too high, or always flew slightly to the left.

Their teacher, Madam Hooch, arrived. She had short, gray hair, and yellow eyes like a hawk.

“Well, what are you all waiting for?” she barked. “Everyone stand

by a broomstick. Come on, hurry up.”

Harry glanced down at his broom. It was old and some of the twigs stuck out at odd angles.

“Stick out your right hand over your broom,” called Madam Hooch at the front, “and say ‘Up!’”

“UP!” everyone shouted.

Harry’s broom jumped into his hand at once, but it was one of the few that did. Hermione Granger’s had simply rolled over on the ground, and Neville’s hadn’t moved at all. Perhaps brooms, like horses, could tell when you were afraid, thought Harry; there was a quaver in Neville’s voice that said only too clearly that he wanted to keep his feet on the ground.

Madam Hooch then showed them how to mount their brooms without sliding off the end, and walked up and down the rows correcting their grips. Harry and Ron were delighted when she told Malfoy he’d been doing it wrong for years.

“Now, when I blow my whistle, you kick off from the ground, hard,” said Madam Hooch. “Keep your brooms steady, rise a few feet, and then come straight back down by leaning forward slightly. On my whistle — three — two —”

But Neville, nervous and jumpy and frightened of being left on the ground, pushed off hard before the whistle had touched Madam Hooch’s lips.

“Come back, boy!” she shouted, but Neville was rising straight up like a cork shot out of a bottle — twelve feet — twenty feet. Harry saw his scared white face look down at the ground falling away, saw him gasp, slip sideways off the broom and —

WHAM — a thud and a nasty crack and Neville lay facedown on the grass in a heap. His broomstick was still rising higher and higher, and started to drift lazily toward the forbidden forest and out of sight.

Madam Hooch was bending over Neville, her face as white as his.

“Broken wrist,” Harry heard her mutter. “Come on, boy — it’s all right, up you get.”

She turned to the rest of the class.

“None of you is to move while I take this boy to the hospital wing! You leave those brooms where they are or you’ll be out of Hogwarts before you can say ‘Quidditch.’ Come on, dear.”

Neville, his face tear-streaked, clutching his wrist, hobbled off with Madam Hooch, who had her arm around him.

No sooner were they out of earshot than Malfoy burst into laughter.

“Did you see his face, the great lump?”

The other Slytherins joined in.

“Shut up, Malfoy,” snapped Parvati Patil.

“Ooh, sticking up for Longbottom?” said Pansy Parkinson, a hard-faced Slytherin girl. “Never thought *you’d* like fat little crybabies, Parvati.”

“Look!” said Malfoy, darting forward and snatching something out of the grass. “It’s that stupid thing Longbottom’s gran sent him.”

The Remembrall glittered in the sun as he held it up.

“Give that here, Malfoy,” said Harry quietly. Everyone stopped talking to watch.

Malfoy smiled nastily.

“I think I’ll leave it somewhere for Longbottom to find — how about — up a tree?”

“Give it *here!*” Harry yelled, but Malfoy had leapt onto his broomstick and taken off. He hadn’t been lying, he *could* fly well. Hovering level with the topmost branches of an oak he called, “Come and get it, Potter!”

Harry grabbed his broom.

“*No!*” shouted Hermione Granger. “Madam Hooch told us not to move — you’ll get us all into trouble.”

Harry ignored her. Blood was pounding in his ears. He mounted the broom and kicked hard against the ground and up, up he soared; air rushed through his hair, and his robes whipped out behind him — and in a rush of fierce joy he realized he’d found something he could do without being taught — this was easy, this was *wonderful*. He pulled his broomstick up a little to take it even higher, and heard screams and gasps of girls back on the ground and an admiring whoop from Ron.

He turned his broomstick sharply to face Malfoy in midair. Malfoy looked stunned.

“Give it here,” Harry called, “or I’ll knock you off that broom!”

“Oh, yeah?” said Malfoy, trying to sneer, but looking worried.

Harry knew, somehow, what to do. He leaned forward and grasped the broom tightly in both hands, and it shot toward Malfoy like a javelin. Malfoy only just got out of the way in time; Harry made a sharp about-face and held the broom steady. A few people below were clapping.

“No Crabbe and Goyle up here to save your neck, Malfoy,” Harry called.

The same thought seemed to have struck Malfoy.

“Catch it if you can, then!” he shouted, and he threw the glass ball high into the air and streaked back toward the ground.

Harry saw, as though in slow motion, the ball rise up in the air and then start to fall. He leaned forward and pointed his broom handle down — next second he was gathering speed in a steep dive, racing the ball — wind whistled in his ears, mingled with the screams of people watching — he stretched out his hand — a foot from the ground he caught it, just in time to pull his broom straight, and he toppled gently onto the grass with the Remembrall clutched safely in his fist.

“HARRY POTTER!”

His heart sank faster than he’d just dived. Professor McGonagall was running toward them. He got to his feet, trembling.

“*Never* — in all my time at Hogwarts —”

Professor McGonagall was almost speechless with shock, and her glasses flashed furiously, “— how *dare* you — might have broken your neck —”

“It wasn’t his fault, Professor —”

“Be quiet, Miss Patil —”

“But Malfoy —”

“That’s *enough*, Mr. Weasley. Potter, follow me, now.”

Harry caught sight of Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle’s triumphant faces as he left, walking numbly in Professor McGonagall’s wake as she strode toward the castle. He was going to be expelled, he just knew it. He wanted to say something to defend himself, but there seemed to be something wrong with his voice. Professor McGonagall was sweeping along without even looking at him; he had to jog to

keep up. Now he'd done it. He hadn't even lasted two weeks. He'd be packing his bags in ten minutes. What would the Dursleys say when he turned up on the doorstep?

Up the front steps, up the marble staircase inside, and still Professor McGonagall didn't say a word to him. She wrenched open doors and marched along corridors with Harry trotting miserably behind her. Maybe she was taking him to Dumbledore. He thought of Hagrid, expelled but allowed to stay on as gamekeeper. Perhaps he could be Hagrid's assistant. His stomach twisted as he imagined it, watching Ron and the others becoming wizards while he stumped around the grounds carrying Hagrid's bag.

Professor McGonagall stopped outside a classroom. She opened the door and poked her head inside.

"Excuse me, Professor Flitwick, could I borrow Wood for a moment?"

Wood? thought Harry, bewildered; was Wood a cane she was going to use on him?

But Wood turned out to be a person, a burly fifth-year boy who came out of Flitwick's class looking confused.

"Follow me, you two," said Professor McGonagall, and they marched on up the corridor, Wood looking curiously at Harry.

"In here."

Professor McGonagall pointed them into a classroom that was empty except for Peeves, who was busy writing rude words on the blackboard.

"Out, Peeves!" she barked. Peeves threw the chalk into a bin, which clanged loudly, and he swooped out cursing. Professor

McGonagall slammed the door behind him and turned to face the two boys.

“Potter, this is Oliver Wood. Wood — I’ve found you a Seeker.”

Wood’s expression changed from puzzlement to delight.

“Are you serious, Professor?”

“Absolutely,” said Professor McGonagall crisply. “The boy’s a natural. I’ve never seen anything like it. Was that your first time on a broomstick, Potter?”

Harry nodded silently. He didn’t have a clue what was going on, but he didn’t seem to be being expelled, and some of the feeling started coming back to his legs.

“He caught that thing in his hand after a fifty-foot dive,” Professor McGonagall told Wood. “Didn’t even scratch himself. Charlie Weasley couldn’t have done it.”

Wood was now looking as though all his dreams had come true at once.

“Ever seen a game of Quidditch, Potter?” he asked excitedly.

“Wood’s captain of the Gryffindor team,” Professor McGonagall explained.

“He’s just the build for a Seeker, too,” said Wood, now walking around Harry and staring at him. “Light — speedy — we’ll have to get him a decent broom, Professor — a Nimbus Two Thousand or a Cleansweep Seven, I’d say.”

“I shall speak to Professor Dumbledore and see if we can’t bend the first-year rule. Heaven knows, we need a better team than last year. *Flattened* in that last match by Slytherin, I couldn’t look Severus Snape in the face for weeks. . . .”

Professor McGonagall peered sternly over her glasses at Harry.

“I want to hear you’re training hard, Potter, or I may change my mind about punishing you.”

Then she suddenly smiled.

“Your father would have been proud,” she said. “He was an excellent Quidditch player himself.”

“You’re *joking*.”

It was dinnertime. Harry had just finished telling Ron what had happened when he’d left the grounds with Professor McGonagall. Ron had a piece of steak and kidney pie halfway to his mouth, but he’d forgotten all about it.

“*Seeker?*” he said. “But first years *never* — you must be the youngest House player in about —”

“— a century,” said Harry, shoveling pie into his mouth. He felt particularly hungry after the excitement of the afternoon. “Wood told me.”

Ron was so amazed, so impressed, he just sat and gaped at Harry.

“I start training next week,” said Harry. “Only don’t tell anyone, Wood wants to keep it a secret.”

Fred and George Weasley now came into the hall, spotted Harry, and hurried over.

“Well done,” said George in a low voice. “Wood told us. We’re on the team too — Beaters.”

“I tell you, we’re going to win that Quidditch Cup for sure this year,” said Fred. “We haven’t won since Charlie left, but this year’s team is going to be brilliant. You must be good, Harry, Wood was almost skipping when he told us.”

“Anyway, we’ve got to go, Lee Jordan reckons he’s found a new secret passageway out of the school.”

“Bet it’s that one behind the statue of Gregory the Smarmy that we found in our first week. See you.”

Fred and George had hardly disappeared when someone far less welcome turned up: Malfoy, flanked by Crabbe and Goyle.

“Having a last meal, Potter? When are you getting the train back to the Muggles?”

“You’re a lot braver now that you’re back on the ground and you’ve got your little friends with you,” said Harry coolly. There was of course nothing at all little about Crabbe and Goyle, but as the High Table was full of teachers, neither of them could do more than crack their knuckles and scowl.

“I’d take you on anytime on my own,” said Malfoy. “Tonight, if you want. Wizard’s duel. Wands only — no contact. What’s the matter? Never heard of a wizard’s duel before, I suppose?”

“Of course he has,” said Ron, wheeling around. “I’m his second, who’s yours?”

Malfoy looked at Crabbe and Goyle, sizing them up.

“Crabbe,” he said. “Midnight all right? We’ll meet you in the trophy room; that’s always unlocked.”

When Malfoy had gone, Ron and Harry looked at each other.

“What *is* a wizard’s duel?” said Harry. “And what do you mean, you’re my second?”

“Well, a second’s there to take over if you die,” said Ron casually, getting started at last on his cold pie. Catching the look on Harry’s face, he added quickly, “But people only die in proper duels, you

know, with real wizards. The most you and Malfoy'll be able to do is send sparks at each other. Neither of you knows enough magic to do any real damage. I bet he expected you to refuse, anyway."

"And what if I wave my wand and nothing happens?"

"Throw it away and punch him on the nose," Ron suggested.

"Excuse me."

They both looked up. It was Hermione Granger.

"Can't a person eat in peace in this place?" said Ron.

Hermione ignored him and spoke to Harry.

"I couldn't help overhearing what you and Malfoy were saying —"

"Bet you could," Ron muttered.

"— and you *mustn't* go wandering around the school at night, think of the points you'll lose Gryffindor if you're caught, and you're bound to be. It's really very selfish of you."

"And it's really none of your business," said Harry.

"Good-bye," said Ron.

All the same, it wasn't what you'd call the perfect end to the day, Harry thought, as he lay awake much later listening to Dean and Seamus falling asleep (Neville wasn't back from the hospital wing). Ron had spent all evening giving him advice such as "If he tries to curse you, you'd better dodge it, because I can't remember how to block them." There was a very good chance they were going to get caught by Filch or Mrs. Norris, and Harry felt he was pushing his luck, breaking another school rule today. On the other hand, Malfoy's sneering face kept looming up out of the darkness — this was his big chance to beat Malfoy face-to-face. He couldn't miss it.

"Half-past eleven," Ron muttered at last, "we'd better go."

They pulled on their bathrobes, picked up their wands, and crept across the tower room, down the spiral staircase, and into the Gryffindor common room. A few embers were still glowing in the fireplace, turning all the armchairs into hunched black shadows. They had almost reached the portrait hole when a voice spoke from the chair nearest them, “I can’t believe you’re going to do this, Harry.”

A lamp flickered on. It was Hermione Granger, wearing a pink bathrobe and a frown.

“*You!*” said Ron furiously. “Go back to bed!”

“I almost told your brother,” Hermione snapped, “Percy — he’s a prefect, he’d put a stop to this.”

Harry couldn’t believe anyone could be so interfering.

“Come on,” he said to Ron. He pushed open the portrait of the Fat Lady and climbed through the hole.

Hermione wasn’t going to give up that easily. She followed Ron through the portrait hole, hissing at them like an angry goose.

“Don’t you *care* about Gryffindor, do you *only* care about yourselves, *I* don’t want Slytherin to win the House Cup, and you’ll lose all the points I got from Professor McGonagall for knowing about Switching Spells.”

“Go away.”

“All right, but I warned you, you just remember what I said when you’re on the train home tomorrow, you’re so —”

But what they were, they didn’t find out. Hermione had turned to the portrait of the Fat Lady to get back inside and found herself facing an empty painting. The Fat Lady had gone on a nighttime visit and Hermione was locked out of Gryffindor Tower.

“Now what am I going to do?” she asked shrilly.

“That’s your problem,” said Ron. “We’ve got to go, we’re going to be late.”

They hadn’t even reached the end of the corridor when Hermione caught up with them.

“I’m coming with you,” she said.

“You are *not*.”

“D’you think I’m going to stand out here and wait for Filch to catch me? If he finds all three of us I’ll tell him the truth, that I was trying to stop you, and you can back me up.”

“You’ve got some nerve —” said Ron loudly.

“Shut up, both of you!” said Harry sharply. “I heard something.”

It was a sort of snuffling.

“Mrs. Norris?” breathed Ron, squinting through the dark.

It wasn’t Mrs. Norris. It was Neville. He was curled up on the floor, fast asleep, but jerked suddenly awake as they crept nearer.

“Thank goodness you found me! I’ve been out here for hours, I couldn’t remember the new password to get in to bed.”

“Keep your voice down, Neville. The password’s ‘Pig snout’ but it won’t help you now, the Fat Lady’s gone off somewhere.”

“How’s your arm?” said Harry.

“Fine,” said Neville, showing them. “Madam Pomfrey mended it in about a minute.”

“Good — well, look, Neville, we’ve got to be somewhere, we’ll see you later —”

“Don’t leave me!” said Neville, scrambling to his feet, “I don’t want to stay here alone, the Bloody Baron’s been past twice

already.”

Ron looked at his watch and then glared furiously at Hermione and Neville.

“If either of you get us caught, I’ll never rest until I’ve learned that Curse of the Bogies Quirrell told us about, and used it on you.”

Hermione opened her mouth, perhaps to tell Ron exactly how to use the Curse of the Bogies, but Harry hissed at her to be quiet and beckoned them all forward.

They flitted along corridors striped with bars of moonlight from the high windows. At every turn Harry expected to run into Filch or Mrs. Norris, but they were lucky. They sped up a staircase to the third floor and tiptoed toward the trophy room.

Malfoy and Crabbe weren’t there yet. The crystal trophy cases glimmered where the moonlight caught them. Cups, shields, plates, and statues winked silver and gold in the darkness. They edged along the walls, keeping their eyes on the doors at either end of the room. Harry took out his wand in case Malfoy leapt in and started at once. The minutes crept by.

“He’s late, maybe he’s chickened out,” Ron whispered.

Then a noise in the next room made them jump. Harry had only just raised his wand when they heard someone speak — and it wasn’t Malfoy.

“Sniff around, my sweet, they might be lurking in a corner.”

It was Filch speaking to Mrs. Norris. Horror-struck, Harry waved madly at the other three to follow him as quickly as possible; they scurried silently toward the door, away from Filch’s voice. Neville’s robes had barely whipped round the corner when they heard Filch

enter the trophy room.

“They’re in here somewhere,” they heard him mutter, “probably hiding.”

“This way!” Harry mouthed to the others and, petrified, they began to creep down a long gallery full of suits of armor. They could hear Filch getting nearer. Neville suddenly let out a frightened squeak and broke into a run — he tripped, grabbed Ron around the waist, and the pair of them toppled right into a suit of armor.

The clanging and crashing were enough to wake the whole castle.

“RUN!” Harry yelled, and the four of them sprinted down the gallery, not looking back to see whether Filch was following — they swung around the doorpost and galloped down one corridor then another, Harry in the lead, without any idea where they were or where they were going — they ripped through a tapestry and found themselves in a hidden passageway, hurtled along it and came out near their Charms classroom, which they knew was miles from the trophy room.

“I think we’ve lost him,” Harry panted, leaning against the cold wall and wiping his forehead. Neville was bent double, wheezing and spluttering.

“I — *told* — you,” Hermione gasped, clutching at the stitch in her chest, “I — told — you.”

“We’ve got to get back to Gryffindor Tower,” said Ron, “quickly as possible.”

“Malfoy tricked you,” Hermione said to Harry. “You realize that, don’t you? He was never going to meet you — Filch knew someone was going to be in the trophy room, Malfoy must have tipped him

off.”

Harry thought she was probably right, but he wasn’t going to tell her that.

“Let’s go.”

It wasn’t going to be that simple. They hadn’t gone more than a dozen paces when a doorknob rattled and something came shooting out of a classroom in front of them.

It was Peeves. He caught sight of them and gave a squeal of delight.

“Shut up, Peeves — please — you’ll get us thrown out.”

Peeves cackled.

“Wandering around at midnight, Ickle Firsties? Tut, tut, tut. Naughty, naughty, you’ll get caughty.”

“Not if you don’t give us away, Peeves, please.”

“Should tell Filch, I should,” said Peeves in a saintly voice, but his eyes glittered wickedly. “It’s for your own good, you know.”

“Get out of the way,” snapped Ron, taking a swipe at Peeves — this was a big mistake.

“STUDENTS OUT OF BED!” Peeves bellowed, “STUDENTS OUT OF BED DOWN THE CHARMS CORRIDOR!”

Ducking under Peeves, they ran for their lives, right to the end of the corridor where they slammed into a door — and it was locked.

“This is it!” Ron moaned, as they pushed helplessly at the door, “We’re done for! This is the end!”

They could hear footsteps, Filch running as fast as he could toward Peeves’s shouts.

“Oh, move over,” Hermione snarled. She grabbed Harry’s wand,

tapped the lock, and whispered, "*Alohomora!*"

The lock clicked and the door swung open — they piled through it, shut it quickly, and pressed their ears against it, listening.

"Which way did they go, Peeves?" Filch was saying. "Quick, tell me."

"Say 'please.'"

"Don't mess with me, Peeves, now *where did they go?*"

"Shan't say nothing if you don't say please," said Peeves in his annoying singsong voice.

"All right — *please.*"

"NOTHING! Ha haaa! Told you I wouldn't say nothing if you didn't say please! Ha ha! Haaaaaa!" And they heard the sound of Peeves whooshing away and Filch cursing in rage.

"He thinks this door is locked," Harry whispered. "I think we'll be okay — get *off*, Neville!" For Neville had been tugging on the sleeve of Harry's bathrobe for the last minute. "*What?*"

Harry turned around — and saw, quite clearly, what. For a moment, he was sure he'd walked into a nightmare — this was too much, on top of everything that had happened so far.

They weren't in a room, as he had supposed. They were in a corridor. The forbidden corridor on the third floor. And now they knew why it was forbidden.

They were looking straight into the eyes of a monstrous dog, a dog that filled the whole space between ceiling and floor. It had three heads. Three pairs of rolling, mad eyes; three noses, twitching and quivering in their direction; three drooling mouths, saliva hanging in slippery ropes from yellowish fangs.

It was standing quite still, all six eyes staring at them, and Harry knew that the only reason they weren't already dead was that their sudden appearance had taken it by surprise, but it was quickly getting over that, there was no mistaking what those thunderous growls meant.

Harry groped for the doorknob — between Filch and death, he'd take Filch.

They fell backward — Harry slammed the door shut, and they ran, they almost flew, back down the corridor. Filch must have hurried off to look for them somewhere else, because they didn't see him anywhere, but they hardly cared — all they wanted to do was put as much space as possible between them and that monster. They didn't stop running until they reached the portrait of the Fat Lady on the seventh floor.

“Where on earth have you all been?” she asked, looking at their bathrobes hanging off their shoulders and their flushed, sweaty faces.

“Never mind that — pig snout, pig snout,” panted Harry, and the portrait swung forward. They scrambled into the common room and collapsed, trembling, into armchairs.

It was a while before any of them said anything. Neville, indeed, looked as if he'd never speak again.

“What do they think they're doing, keeping a thing like that locked up in a school?” said Ron finally. “If any dog needs exercise, that one does.”

Hermione had got both her breath and her bad temper back again.

“You don't use your eyes, any of you, do you?” she snapped. “Didn't you see what it was standing on?”

“The floor?” Harry suggested. “I wasn’t looking at its feet, I was too busy with its heads.”

“No, *not* the floor. It was standing on a trapdoor. It’s obviously guarding something.”

She stood up, glaring at them.

“I hope you’re pleased with yourselves. We could all have been killed — or worse, expelled. Now, if you don’t mind, I’m going to bed.”

Ron stared after her, his mouth open.

“No, we don’t mind,” he said. “You’d think we dragged her along, wouldn’t you?”

But Hermione had given Harry something else to think about as he climbed back into bed. The dog was guarding something. . . . What had Hagrid said? Gringotts was the safest place in the world for something you wanted to hide — except perhaps Hogwarts.

It looked as though Harry had found out where the grubby little package from vault seven hundred and thirteen was.

Die Tweegeveg om Middernag

Harry sou nooit kon glo dat hy 'n seun meer sal kan haat as Dudley nie, maar dit was voor hy vir Draco Malfoy ontmoet het. Gelukkig het die eerstejaars van Griffindor net Towerdrankies saam met Slibberin, dus het hy nie veel met Malfoy te doene nie. Dis nou tot iemand 'n kennisgewing in die Griffindor-geselskamer raak sien. Almal kreun. Vlieglesse begin Donderdag – en Griffindor en Slibberin is saam.

“Tipies,” sê Harry grimmig. “Net wat ek nog altyd wou hê. Om 'n gek van myself op 'n besemstok te maak voor Malfoy.”

Hy het meer na die vlieëry uitgesien as na enigets anders.

“Jy gaan nie 'n gek van jouself maak nie,” sê Ron. “Ek weet Malfoy gaan altyd aan oor hoe goed hy met Kwiddiek is, maar ek wed dis net praatjies.”

Malfoy praat beslis baie oor vlieg. Hy kla bitterlik oor die eerstejaars nie in die Kwiddiek-spanne mag speel nie en vertel lang, uitgerekte spogstories wat altyd eindig met hoe hy net-net ontsnap van Moggels wat hom in helikopters volg. Hy's ook nie die enigste een nie. As 'n mens vir Septimus Floris kan glo, het hy die grootste deel van sy kinderjare op die platteland op 'n besem deurgebring. Selfs Ron vertel vir almal wat net lyk of hulle luister, hoe hy, op Charlie se ou besem, amper met 'n hangvlieër gebots het. Almal uit ou towenaarsfamilies praat feitlik net oor Kwiddiek. Ron het reeds lelik vasgesit met Dean Thomas, wat in hul slaapsaal is, oor sokker. Ron kan nie verstaan wat lekker kan wees aan 'n spel waar daar net een bal is en jy ook nie mag vlieg nie. Harry het gesien hoe Ron aan Dean se plakkaat van die West Ham-sokkerspan druk, in 'n poging om die spelers te laat beweeg.

Neville het in sy lewe nog nooit op 'n besem gevlieg nie, want sy ouma wou hom nie naby een toelaat nie. In die geheim dink Harry dit was met goeie rede, want Neville is 'n regte ongeluksvoël, selfs wanneer albei sy voete plat op die aarde is.

Hermien la Grange is amper net so senuagtig oor die vlieëry as Neville. Dis nie iets wat jy uit jou kop uit 'n boek kan leer nie – nie dat sy nie probeer het nie. Daardie Donderdag tydens ontbyt verveel sy almal met

handige wenke oor vlieg wat sy in 'n biblioteekboek met die naam *Kwid-diek deur die Eeue* gelees het. Neville hang aan elke woord, desperaat vir iets wat hom dalk later sal help om bo-op sy besem te bly, maar al die ander is net te bly toe hul pos kom en Hermien ophou praat.

Harry het nog nie een enkele brief gekry sedert Hagrid se nota nie, iets wat Malfoy natuurlik dadelik opgelet het. Malfoy se ooruil bring gedurig vir hom pakkies lekkers van die huis af, wat hy daar aan die Slibberintafel oopmaak.

'n Nonnetjies-uil het vir Neville 'n pakkie van sy ouma af gebring. Hy maak dit opgewonde oop en wys vir almal die glasbal wat so groot soos 'n reusealbaster is en lyk of dit vol wit rook is.

"Dis 'n Onthouer!" roep hy uit. "My ouma weet ek vergeet altyd alles – dit vertel jou as daar iets is wat jy vergeet het om te doen. Kyk, jy hou dit styf vas en as dit rooi word – oe! . . ." Sy gesig val, want die Onthouer gloei skielik skarlakenrooi, ". . . dan het jy iets vergeet . . ."

Terwyl Neville probeer onthou wat hy nou eintlik vergeet het, gryp Draco Malfoy, wat net toe verby die Griffindor-tafel stap, die Onthouer uit sy hand.

Harry en Ron spring gelyktydig op. Hulle soek 'n kans om met Malfoy te baklei, maar professor McGonagall, wat moeilikheid vinniger kan raak sien as enige ander onderwyser in die skool, is soos blits op hulle.

"Wat gaan hier aan?"

"Malfoy het my Onthouer gevat, professor."

Malfoy laat val die Onthouer grimmig op die tafel.

"Het net gekyk," sê hy en loop druipstert weg met Krabbe en Goliat agterna.

Halfvier daardie middag skarrel Harry, Ron en die ander Griffindor-lede met die voortrappe af na die veld waar hul eerste vliegles gaan wees. Dis 'n helder, winderige dag en die gras ritsel onder hul voete toe hulle teen die skuins grasperke afstap na 'n plat grasperk aan die oorkant van die verbode woud. Die bome van die verbode woud swaai dreigend in die wind.

Die Slibberins is reeds daar, en so ook twintig besemstokke wat in netjiese rye op die grond lê. Harry het gehoor hoe Fred en George oor die skool se besems kla. Hulle sê party van die besems vibreer as jy te hoog vlieg en ander vlieg skeef.

Hul onderwyser, Madame Hooch, daag op. Sy het kort grys hare en geel oë soos 'n valk.

"So, waarvoor wag julle?" blaf sy. "Gaan staan by 'n besem, almal van julle. Toe-toe, opskud!"

Harry loer na sy besem. Dit is oud en van die grasse steek skeef uit.

"Hou jou regterhand oor jou besem," roep Madame Hooch daar van voor af, "en sê 'Op!'"

“OP!” skreeu almal.

Harry se besem spring dadelik in sy hand, maar dis een van die min wat dit doen. Hermien la Grange s'n rol net eenvoudig om op die grond en Neville s'n roer glad nie. Dalk weet besems, net soos perde, of jy vir hulle bang is, dink Harry; daar was 'n trilling in Neville se stem wat duidelik gesê het dat hy eerder sy voete op die grond wil hou.

Madame Hooch beduie hoe hulle moet opklim sonder om af te gly en stap met die rye langs en wys vir almal die regte greep. Harry en Ron kry lekker toe sy vir Malfoy sê dat hy dit heeltemal verkeerd doen.

“Sodra ek my fluitjie blaas, skop julle weg, hard,” sê Madame Hooch. “Hou jul besems stewig vas, styg 'n meter of so op en kom weer reguit grond toe deur effens vooroor te leun. Wanneer ek blaas – drie – twee –”

Neville, ontsenu en verskrik en bang dat hy op die grond gaan agterbly, stoot hard nog voor die fluitjie aan Madame Hooch se lippe raak.

“Kom terug, seun!” skree sy, maar Neville styg reguit op soos 'n prop uit 'n bottel – drie meter – ses meter. Harry sien hoe sy benoude wit gesig na onder staar terwyl die grond onder hom wegraak, sien hoe hy na asem snak, skeef van sy besem afgly en –

BOEM – daar is 'n slag en 'n nare kraakgeluid en toe lê Neville gesig eerste in 'n hopie op die gras. Sy besemstok styg steeds hoër en hoër en begin dryf in die rigting van die verbode woud. Toe verdwyn dit buite sig.

Madame Hooch buig oor Neville, haar gesig net so bleek soos syne.

“Gebreekte pols,” hoor Harry haar mompel. “Kom, boet – dis nie so erg nie, staan op.”

Sy draai na die res van die klas.

“Julle roer nie terwyl ek hierdie seun na die siekeboeg toe neem nie! Los daardie besems uit of julle is uit Hogwarts voor julle 'Kwiddiek' kan sê. Kom, boet.”

Neville, sy gesig besmeer met trane en sy pols geklem in een hand, hobbelsaam saam met Madame Hooch, wat haar arm om hom geslaan het.

Hulle is skaars buite hoorafstand of Malfoy bars uit van die lag.

“Het julle sy gesig gesien, die idioot?”

Die ander Slibberin-lede spot saam.

“Hou jou bek, Malfoy,” snou Parvati Patel hom toe.

“Oee, kom op vir Loggerenberg, hê?” sê Pansy Parkinson, 'n Slibberin-meisie met 'n harde trek op haar gesig. “Nie gedink jy hou van klein vet tjankbalies nie, Parvati.”

“Kyk,” sê Malfoy en spring vorentoe en raap iets op uit die gras, “dis daardie simpel ding wat Loggerenberg se ouma vir hom gestuur het.”

Die Onthouer glinster in die son toe hy dit in die lug hou.

“Gee dit hier, Malfoy,” sê Harry sag. Almal hou op praat en kyk na hulle. Malfoy grynslag vermakerig.

“Ek dink ek sal dit iewers sit waar Loggerenberg dit kan kom haal – wat van – bo in ’n boom?”

“Gee dit hier!” skreeu Harry, maar Malfoy het reeds op sy besem gespring en vlieg die lug in. Hy het nie oordryf nie, hy *kan* goed vlieg – hy hang in die lug net bo die boomtoppe en skreeu, “Kom haal dit as jy kan, Potter!”

Harry gryp sy besem.

“Nee!” gil Hermien la Grange. “Madame Hooch het gesê ons mag nie – julle sal ons almal in die moeilikheid bring.”

Harry steur hom nie aan haar nie. Die bloed suis in sy ore. Hy spring op sy besem, skop hard weg en op, op, trek hy die lug in. Die wind warrel deur sy hare en sy kleeed staan met ’n boog agter hom – in ’n gloed van opwinding besef hy dat hy iets kan doen wat hy nie hoef te leer nie – dit is maklik, dit is *wonderlik*. Hy pluk die besemstok effens op om selfs hoër te vlieg en hoor ademlose krete en gille van die meisies doer onder op die grond en ’n bewonderende uitroep van Ron.

Hy swenk skerp en daar, hoog in die lug, staar hy Malfoy vierkant in die oë. Malfoy lyk verbyster.

“Gee hier,” roep Harry, “of ek klap jou bo van daardie besem af!”

“Jy en wie?” sê Malfoy, maar hy lyk bekommerd.

Dis of Harry net weet wat om te doen. Hy leun vooroor en vat die besemstok styf tussen sy hande vas en dit pyl soos ’n werpspies op Malfoy af. Malfoy gee net betyds pad; Harry maak ’n skerp draai en hou die besem stewig vas. Onder hulle klap ’n paar mense hande.

“Krabbe en Goliath is nie hier om jou bas te red nie, Malfoy,” roep Harry uit.

Malfoy moet aan dieselfde ding gedink het.

“Vang dit as jy kan!” skree hy en gooi die glasbal hoog die lug in voordat dit grond toe begin val.

Asof in stadige aksie sien Harry hoe die bal die lug in styg en dan begin terugval. Hy leun vooroor en druk sy besemstok af – die volgende oomblik jaag hy die bal in ’n duiselingwekkende duik – die wind fluit in sy ore, gemeng met die krete van die mense wat kyk – hy steek sy hand uit – minder as ’n halwe meter van die grond vang hy die bal, net betyds om sy besem se neus te lig sodat hy liggies oor die grond rol met die Onthouer veilig in sy vuus.

“HARRY POTTER!”

Sy hart sink vinniger as wat hy so pas geduik het. Professor McGonagall kom aangehardloop. Bewend spring hy op.

“Nooit – solank ek op Hogwarts was –” Professor McGonagall is feitlik sprakeloos van skok en haar brilglase blits van woede, “– hoe *durf* jy – kon jou nek gebreek het –”

“Dit was nie sy skuld nie, professor –”

“Bly stil, juffrou Patel –”

“Maar Malfoy –”

“Dit is *genoeg*, mnr. Weasley. Potter, kom saam met my, nou dadelik.”

Harry vang ’n glimp van Malfoy, Krabbe en Goliath se triomfantlike gesigte toe hy, met ’n dooie gevoel, agter professor McGonagall aan kasteel toe stap. Hy gaan geskors word, hy weet dit. Hy wil iets sê om homself te verdedig, maar dis of daar fout is met sy stem. Professor McGonagall swiep vooruit sonder om eens in sy rigting te kyk; hy moet draf om by te bly. Nou het hy alles opgedons. Hy’t nie eens twee weke gehou nie. Binne tien minute sal hy sy tasse moet pak. Wat sal die Dursleys sê as hy daar op hul voorstoep staan?

Op met die voortrap, op met die marmertappe aan die binnekant van die kasteel, en steeds sê professor McGonagall nie ’n woord nie. Sy pluk deure oop en marsjeer in die gange af terwyl ’n sielsongelukkige Harry agter haar aandraf. Dalk neem sy hom na Dompeldorius. Hy dink aan Hagrid, geskors, maar toegelaat om aan te bly as boswagter. Miskien kan hy Hagrid se assistent word. Sy maag draai as hy daaraan dink, hoe Ron en al die ander towenaars word terwyl hy oor die terrein strompel en Hagrid se sakke dra.

Net buite ’n klaskamer steek professor McGonagall vas. Sy maak die deur oop en steek haar kop in.

“Verskoon my, professor Flickerpitt, kan ek Wood vir ’n paar oomblikke leen?”

Wood? dink Harry verwilderd. Is Wood ’n rottang wat sy op hom gaan gebruik?

Maar Wood is ’n persoon, ’n frisgeboude vyfdejaar wat uit Flickerpitt se klas kom en verward lyk.

“Volg my, julle twee,” sê professor McGonagall en hulle marsjeer af in die gang, terwyl Wood onderlangs nuuskierig na Harry kyk.

“Hier in.”

Professor McGonagall wys dat hulle by ’n klaskamer moet ingaan wat leeg is, buiten Nurks wat ongeskikte woorde op die bord staan en skryf.

“Uit, Nurks!” beveel sy. Nurks smyt die kryt kletterend in die vullisblik en swiep vloek-vloek uit. Professor McGonagall slaan die deur agter hom toe en draai na die seuns.

“Potter, dit is Oliver Wood. Wood – hier’s ’n Soeker vir jou.”

Wood se gesig verander van absolute verwarring na louter vreugde.

“Is u ernstig, professor?”

“Volkome,” sê professor McGonagall ferm. “Die seun het ’n aangebore talent. So iets het ek nog nooit tevore gesien nie. Was dit jou eerste keer op ’n besem, Potter?”

Harry knik woordeloos. Hy het nie ’n idee waarvan hulle praat nie, maar dit lyk of hy nie geskors gaan word nie, en die lewe begin terugvloei in sy bene.

“Hy het die ding in sy hand gevang na ’n duik van twintig meter,” vertel professor McGonagall vir Wood. “Het nie ’n skrapie nie. Selfs Charlie Weasley kan hom dit nie nadoen nie.”

Nou lyk Wood asof al sy drome tegelyk bewaarheid word.

“Al ooit ’n Kwiddiek-wedstryd bygewoon, Potter?” vra hy opgewonde.

“Wood is kaptein van Griffindor se span,” verduidelik professor McGonagall.

“Hy’t net die bou vir ’n Soeker, ook,” sê Wood, terwyl hy om Harry stap en hom van kop tot tone bekyk. “Lig – rats – ons sal ’n ordentlike besem vir hom moet kry, Professor – ’n Nimbus Tweeduisend of ’n Wegvee Sewe, sou ek sê.”

“Ek sal met professor Dompeldorius praat en kyk of ons die reëls oor eerstejaars ’n bietjie kan buig. Die vader weet, ons het ’n beter span as laas jaar nodig. Platgevee deur Slibberin in die laaste wedstryd, ek kon Severus Snerp vir weke nie in die oë kyk nie . . .”

Professor McGonagall tuur streng oor haar bril na Harry.

“Ek wil hoor dat jy hard oefen, Potter, of ek verander dalk van plan oor jou straf.”

Dan glimlag sy, heel onverwags.

“Jou pa sou trots op jou gewees het,” sê sy. “Hy was ’n uitstekende Kwiddiek-speler.”

“Dit *lieg* jy.”

Dis etenstyd. Harry het so pas vir Ron vertel wat gebeur het na hy die terrein saam met professor McGonagall verlaat het. ’n Happie biefstuk-en-niertjie-pastei was op pad na Ron se mond, maar hy vergeet skoon daarvan.

“Soeker?” sê hy. “Maar eerstejaars het nog nooit – jy moet die jongste speler vir ’n huis wees in omtrent –”

“n Eeu,” sê Harry, en prop ’n stuk pastei in sy mond. Hy is veral honger na die opwindning van die middag. “Wood sê so.”

Ron is so verbaas, so beïndruk, hy kan net daar sit en vir Harry aangaap.

“Ek begin volgende week oefen,” sê Harry. “Maar jy mag vir niemand sê nie, Wood wil dit geheim hou.”

Net toe kom Fred en George Weasley aangestap. Hulle sien Harry en kom vinnig nader.

“Mooi skoot,” sê George onderlangs, “Wood het vir ons gesê. Ons is ook in die span – Brekers.”

“Ek sê jou, vanjaar wen ons vir seker daardie Kwiddiek-beker,” sê Fred. “Ons het nog nie weer gewen van Charlie weg is nie, maar hierdie jaar se span gaan briljant wees. Jy moet goed wees, Harry, Wood het amper rondgedans toe hy ons vertel het.”

“Wel, ons moet gaan, Lee Jordaan sê hy’t nog ’n geheime tonnel gevind om uit die skool te kom.”

“Wed dis die een agter die standbeeld van Gregorius die Inkruiper wat ons laas week gekry het. Sien julle.”

Fred en George is skaars weg of iemand wat baie minder welkom is, daag op: Malfoy, bygestaan deur Krabbe en Goliat.

“Nuttig jou laaste maaltyd, of wat sê ek, Potter? Wanneer klim jy op die trein terug na die Moggels toe?”

“Jy’s baie dapperder vandat jy terug is op die grond en jou maatjies langs jou het,” sê Harry koel. Daar is natuurlik niks kleins aan Krabbe of Goliat nie, maar omdat die Hooftafel vol onderwysers is, kan die twee niks anders doen as om hul kneukels te kraak en te grynslag nie.

“Ek sal jou enige tyd op my eie takel,” sê Malfoy. “Vanaand, as jy wil. Towenaarstweegeveg. Slegs towerstawwe – geen kontak nie. Toe, wat’s fout? Nog nie van ’n towenaarstweegeveg gehoor nie, hè?”

“Natuurlik het hy,” sê Ron en tol op sy hak, “ek is sy sekondant, wie’s joune?”

Malfoy tuur opsommend na Krabbe en Goliat.

“Krabbe,” sê hy. “Maak dit middernag. Ons sien julle in die trofee-kamer, dis altyd oop.”

Toe Malfoy buite hoorafstand is, kyk Harry en Ron na mekaar.

“Wat is ’n towenaarstweegeveg?” vra Harry. “En wat vir ’n ding is ’n sekondant?”

“Wel, ’n sekondant is die een wat oorneem as jy doodgaan,” sê Ron ongeërg en vat ’n hap van sy koue pastei. Hy vang die uitdrukking op Harry se gesig en voeg vinnig by, “Maar mense gaan net dood in regte tweegevegte, jy weet, met regte towenaars. Al wat jy en Malfoy sal regkry, is om vonke na mekaar te stuur. Nie een van julle weet genoeg van toor om mekaar regtig seer te maak nie. Ek wed hy’t gedink jy sal nie wil nie.”

“En wat as ek my towerstaf swaai en niks gebeur nie?”

“Gooi dit weg en slaan hom op die neus,” stel Ron voor.

“Verskoon my.”

Albei van hulle kyk op. Dit is Hermien la Grange.

“Kan ’n mens nie in vrede eet in hierdie plek nie?” sê Ron.

Hermien ignoreer hom en draai na Harry.

“Ek kon nie help om te hoor wat jy en Malfoy sê nie –”

“Wed jy kon,” brom Ron.

“– en jy mag net eenvoudig nie in die nag in die skool rondloop nie, dink aan die punte wat jy vir Griffindor gaan verloor as jy gevang word en dis net mooi presies wat gaan gebeur. Dis regtig baie selfsugtig van jou.”

“En dit het regtig net mooi niks met jou uit te waai nie,” sê Harry.

“Tot siens,” sê Ron.

Dit was nou nie juis die volmaakte einde vir 'n dag nie, dink Harry toe hy heelwat later wakker lê en luister hoe Dean en Septimus aan die slaap raak (Neville is nog nie terug van die siekeboeg nie). Die hele aand lank het Ron vir hom raad gegee, soos "As hy jou probeer vervloek, dan moet jy dit systap, want ek kan nie onthou hoe om dit te blok nie." Daar is 'n baie goeie kans dat hulle deur Fillis of mev. Norris uitgevang kan word en Harry weet dat hy 'n yslike kans waag deur 'n tweede skoolreël op die selfde dag te breek. Aan die ander kant sien hy Malfoy se smalende bakies die hele tyd voor hom in die donkerte -- dis sy kans om met Malfoy af te reken. Hy kan dit nie laat verbygaan nie.

"Halftwaalf," hoor hy Ron uiteindelik prewel, "ons moet gaan."

Hulle trek hul kamerjasse aan, tel hul towerstawwe op en sluip oor die toringkamer, af met die spiraaltrappe en tot in Griffindor se geselskamer. In die kaggel gloei nog 'n paar kole en verander die gemakstoele in geboë swart skaduwees. Hulle is amper by die opening waar die portret hang toe hulle 'n stem uit die stoel naaste aan hulle hoor: "Ek kan nie glo dat jy dit werklik wil doen nie, Harry."

'n Lamp flikker en gaan aan. Dit is Hermien la Grange in 'n pienk kamerjas en met 'n frons op haar voorkop.

"Jy!" sê Ron woedend. "Loop slaap, man!"

"Ek het amper vir jou broer gesê," kap Hermien terug, "Percy -- hy's 'n prefek en hy sal julle keer."

Harry kan nie glo dat iemand so kan inmeng nie.

"Kom tog," sê hy vir Ron. Hy stoot die portret van die Vet Vrou opsy en klouter deur die gat.

So maklik gee Hermien nie op nie. Sy volg Ron deur die opening en sis soos 'n briesende gans op hulle.

"Maak Griffindor nie vir julle *saak* nie? Is julle net oor julle *self* gepla? Ek wil nie hê Slibberin moet die huisbeker wen nie en julle gaan al die punte verloor wat ek by professor McGonagall gekry het vir alles wat ek van Wisseltowery af weet."

"Gaan weg."

"Nou maar goed, maar ek het julle gewaarsku, onthou wat ek gesê het, môre, as julle op die trein sit op pad huis toe, julle is net so ontsettend --"

Wat hulle is, sal hulle nooit weet nie. Toe Hermien omdraai na die portret van die Vet Vrou om terug in die kamer te klim, kyk sy vas in 'n leë skildery. Die Vet Vrou het 'n nagtelike besoek gaan aflê en Hermien is uit die Griffindor-toring gesluit.

"Wat gaan ek nou doen?" vra sy skril.

"Dis jou probleem," sê Ron. "Ons moet loop, ons gaan laat wees."

Hulle is nog nie eens aan die einde van die gang nie, of Hermien is by hulle.

"Ek kom saam met julle," sê sy.

“Jy kom nie.”

“Dink julle ek gaan hier staan en wag tot Fillis my vang? As hy ons al drie vang, sal ek hom die waarheid vertel, dat ek julle wou keer en dan kan julle sê dat dit waar is.”

“Watter vermetelheid –” sê Ron vererg.

“Bly tog stil, albei van julle!” sê Harry skerp, “ek het iets gehoor.”

Dis ’n soort snorkgeluid.

“Mev. Norris?” fluister Ron en tuur die donkerte in.

Dis nie mev. Norris nie. Dis Neville. Hy lê opgekrul op die vloer, vas aan die slaap, maar skrik wakker toe hulle nader sluip.

“Dankie tog, julle het my gekry! Ek is al ure lank hier, ek kan nie die nuwe wagwoord onthou om bed toe te kan gaan nie.”

“Moenie so hard praat nie, Neville. Die wagwoord is ‘Varksnoet’ maar dit help jou min, want die Vet Vrou het iewers gaan kuier.”

“Hoe’s jou arm?” vra Harry.

“Orraait,” sê Neville en wys hulle. “Madame Pomfrey het dit feitlik dadelik reggemaak.”

“Goed – wel, kyk, Neville, ons moet iewers heen gaan, ons sien jou later –”

“Julle kan my nie hier los nie!” sê Neville en skarrel orent, “ek wil nie alleen hier bly nie, die Bloedige Baron is al twee keer hier verby.”

Ron loer na sy horlosie en gluur na Hermien en Neville.

“As ons gevang word, leer ek so wraggies die Vloek van die Boeman, die een waarvan Quirrell gepraat het, en dan sit ek dit op julle!”

Hermien maak nog haar mond oop, dalk om vir Ron te sê presies hoe die Vloek van die Boeman werk, maar Harry sê sissend dat sy haar mond moet hou en wink almal om hom te volg.

Hulle glip deur gange waarop die maanlig wat deur die hoë vensters val, lang strepe maak. By elke hoek ver wag Harry om in Fillis of mev. Norris vas te loop, maar die geluk is aan hulle kant. Hulle draf op met die trappe tot op die derde vloer en loop op hul tone na die trofeekamer.

Malfoy en Krabbe is nog nie daar nie. Die kristaltrofee-kabinette glinster waar die maanlig hulle vang. Bikers, skilde, borde en beelde wink in silwer en goud in die skemerdonker. Hulle skuif al langs die muur, hul oë vasgenael op die deure aan weerskante van die vertrek. Harry haal so lank sy towerstaf uit ingeval Malfoy inspring en sommer dadelik begin toor. Die minute kruip verby.

“Hy’s laat. Miskien het hy bang geword,” fluister Ron.

’n Geluid in die vertrek langsaan laat hulle wip van die skrik. Harry het net sy towerstaf gelig toe hy iemand hoor praat – en dis nie Malfoy nie.

“Snuffel, my katjie, dalk skuil hulle in ’n gaatjie.”

Dit is Fillis en hy praat met mev. Norris. Vol afgryse beduie Harry dat die ander hom so vinnig as hul kan, moet volg; hulle skarrel suutjies na

die deur verste van Fillis se stem af. Die punt van Neville se kleed is skaars om die hoek toe hoor hulle hoe Fillis die trofeekamer binnestap.

“Hulle is hier iewers,” hoor hulle hom mompel, “kruip seker weg.”

“Hierdie kant toe!” prewel Harry vir die ander en koud geskrik sluip hulle af deur ’n lang galery vol wapenrustings. Hulle hoor hoe Fillis al nader en nader kom. Meteens los Neville ’n verskrikte piep en begin hardloop – hy struikel, gryp Ron om die lyf en die twee van hulle val teen ’n wapenrusting.

Die gekletter en geklater is genoeg om die hele kasteel wakker te maak.

“HOL!” gil Harry en die vierstuks laat spat af in die galery. Hulle kyk nie terug om te sien of Fillis hulle volg nie – hulle swaai om die kosyn, galop af in een gang en dan weer in ’n volgende, met Harry heel voor, sonder dat hy ’n benul het waar hulle is of waarheen hulle gaan – hulle gooi hulself deur ’n muurbehangsel en bevind hulself in ’n versteekte gang, storm daarmee af en kom uit naby die Towerspel-klaskamer wat kilometers van die trofeekamer af is.

“Ek dink ons het hom afgeskud,” sê Harry blaas-blaas terwyl hy teen die koue muur leun en sy voorkop afvee. Neville is dubbeld gevou. Sy bors fluit en hy snak na asem.

“Ek – het – julle – mos – gesê,” hyg Hermien en gryp na die miltsteek in haar sy, “ek – het – gesê.”

“Ons moet teruggaan na die Griffindor-toring,” sê Ron benoud, “hoe gouer hoe beter.”

“Malfoy het julle lekker gefop,” sê Hermien vir Harry. “Jy besef dit, of hoe? Hy was glad nie van plan om julle daar te ontmoet nie – Fillis het geweet julle gaan in die trofeekamer wees, Malfoy moet hom gesê het.”

Harry reken sy is waarskynlik reg, maar hy verseg om dit te erken.

“Kom ons loop.”

So eenvoudig is dit nie. Hulle het skaars ’n paar tree gegee toe ’n deurknop ratel en iets uit die klaskamer voor hulle uitskiet.

Dis Nurks. Toe hy hulle sien, lag hy skril van plesier.

“Bly tog stil, Nurks – asseblief – jy sal dat hulle ons hier uitgooi.”

Nurks kekkellag.

“So julle eerstejaartjies loop alleen in die middel van die nag rond? T-t-t. Stouties, stouties, pak op die bouties.”

“Net as jy ons weggee, asseblief, Nurks, moenie.”

“Moet vir Fillis sê, ek moet,” sê Nurks in ’n vroom stemmetjie, maar sy oë glinster boos. “Dis vir jul eie beswil, nè.”

“Ag, gee tog pad,” snou Ron hom toe en klap na Nurks. Dit was ’n groot fout.

“STUDENTE WAT NIE IN DIE BED IS NIE!” bulder Nurks, “STUDENTE IN DIE TOWERSPELGANG!”

Hulle duik onderdeur Nurks se arm en hardloop vir die vale tot aan die end van die gang waar hulle hulle in 'n toe deur vasloop – en dit is gesluit.

“Nou is dit klaarpraat!” kreun Ron, terwyl hulle hulpeloos teen die deur druk. “Dis die einde!”

Hulle hoor voetstappe. Dis Fillis wat so vinnig as wat sy bene hom kan dra in die rigting van Nurks se geskree hardloop.

“Gee tog pad,” grom Hermien. Sy gryp Harry se towerstaf, tik teen die slot en fluister, “*Alohomora!*”

Die slot klik en die deur swaai oop – hulle bondel na binne, stoot dit vinnig toe, druk hul ore daarteen en luister.

“Watter kant toe, Nurks?” sê Fillis. “Gou man, praat.”

“Sê ‘asseblief’.”

“Moenie met my kom sukkel nie, Nurks, *waarheen is hulle?*”

“Sê niks nie, sê net ‘bliefies’,” sê Nurks in 'n irriterende sangstemmetjie.

“Goed dan – *asseblief.*”

“NIKS! Ha haaa! Het gesê ek sal ‘niks’ sê, as jy asseblief sê! Ha ha! Haaaaa!” Hulle hoor hoe Nurks wegwarrel en Fillis se woedende gevloek.

“Hy dink die deur is gesluit,” fluister Harry, “ek dink ons is veilig – los my uit, Neville!” Neville trek reeds vir die afgelope minuut aan Harry se kamerjas se mou. “Wat is dit tog?”

Harry draai om – en sien, heeltomal duidelik, wat dit is. Vir 'n oomblik voel dit of hulle in 'n nagmerrie gevang is – na alles wat al gebeur het, is dit eens te erg.

Hulle is nie in 'n kamer soos hy verwag het nie. Hulle is in 'n gang. Die verbode gang op die derde verdieping. En nou weet hy hoekom dit verbode is.

Hulle kyk vas in die oë van 'n monster van 'n hond, 'n hond wat die hele ruimte tussen die plafon en die vloer beslaan. Dit het drie koppe; drie pare rollende, mal oë; drie neuse wat in hul rigting snuffel en snuif en drie kwykende bekke waar die speeksel in slymerige toue aan groot geel slagande hang.

Dit staan doodstil, al ses oë gluur na hulle en Harry weet die enigste rede waarom hulle nog nie dood is nie, is omdat hulle so skielik verskyn het en die gedierte onkant gevang het, maar die enorme hond is vinnig besig om by te kom, dis wat daardie bulderende gegrom moet beteken.

Harry vat die deurknop vas – as hy moet kies tussen Fillis en die dood, kies hy vir Fillis.

Hulle glip uit – Harry slaan die deur toe en hulle laat vat, hulle vlieg omtrent terug in die gang af. Fillis moet vinnig padgegee het om hulle iewers anders te gaan soek, want hulle sien nie 'n teken van hom nie, dit

traak hulle ook net mooi niks – al wat hulle wil doen, is om so ver moontlik van die monster af weg te kom. Hulle hou eers op hardloop toe hulle by die portret van die Vet Vrou op die sewende verdieping kom.

“Waar op dees aarde was julle?” vra sy en kyk na hul kamerjasse wat laag oor hul skouers hang en hul rooi en natgeswete gesigte.

“Maak nie saak nie – varksnoet, varksnoet,” hyg Harry en die portret swaai vorentoe. Hulle klouter deur, strompel in die geselskamer in en sak bewend op die gemakstoele neer.

Dis ’n geruime tyd voordat iemand iets sê. Dit lyk of Neville nooit weer sal kan praat nie.

“Wat doen hulle met so ’n ding hier in die skool?” sê Ron uiteindelik. “Daar’s nou vir jou ’n brak wat kan doen met ’n bietjie oefening.”

Hermien het sowel haar asem as haar slegte humeur teruggekry.

“Julle gebruik ook nie jul oë nie, nè?” snou sy hulle toe. “Het julle nie gesien waarop die ding staan nie?”

“Die vloer?” stel Harry voor. “Ek het nie na sy voete gekyk nie, ek was te besig met al daardie koppe.”

“Nee, nie die vloer nie. Dit staan op ’n valdeur. Dit pas natuurlik iets op.”

Sy staan op en gluur hulle aan.

“Ek hoop julle is in julle skik met juisself. Ons kon almal dood gewees het – erger, geskors. As niemand omgee nie, dan gaan ek nou slaap.”

Ron staar haar met ’n oop mond agterna.

“Nee, ons gee nie om nie,” sê hy. “’n Mens sou sê ons het haar gedwing om saam te gaan.”

Maar Hermien het vir Harry iets anders gegee om oor te dink toe hy in die bed lê. Die hond pas iets op . . . Wat het Hagrid gesê? Edलगolt is die veiligste plek in die wêreld as jy iets het wat jy wil wegsteek – behalwe miskien Hogwarts.

Dit lyk of Harry uitgevind het waar die smerige pakkie van kluis sewehonderd-en-dertien nou is.

CHAPTER TEN



HALLOWEEN

Malfoy couldn't believe his eyes when he saw that Harry and Ron were still at Hogwarts the next day, looking tired but perfectly cheerful. Indeed, by the next morning Harry and Ron thought that meeting the three-headed dog had been an excellent adventure, and they were quite keen to have another one. In the meantime, Harry filled Ron in about the package that seemed to have been moved from Gringotts to Hogwarts, and they spent a lot of time wondering what could possibly need such heavy protection.

"It's either really valuable or really dangerous," said Ron.

"Or both," said Harry.

But as all they knew for sure about the mysterious object was that it was about two inches long, they didn't have much chance of guessing what it was without further clues.

Neither Neville nor Hermione showed the slightest interest in what lay underneath the dog and the trapdoor. All Neville cared about was never going near the dog again.

Hermione was now refusing to speak to Harry and Ron, but she was such a bossy know-it-all that they saw this as an added bonus. All they really wanted now was a way of getting back at Malfoy, and to their great delight, just such a thing arrived in the mail about a week later.

As the owls flooded into the Great Hall as usual, everyone's attention was caught at once by a long, thin package carried by six large screech owls. Harry was just as interested as everyone else to

see what was in this large parcel, and was amazed when the owls soared down and dropped it right in front of him, knocking his bacon to the floor. They had hardly fluttered out of the way when another owl dropped a letter on top of the parcel.

Harry ripped open the letter first, which was lucky, because it said:

DO NOT OPEN THE PARCEL AT THE TABLE.

It contains your new Nimbus Two Thousand, but I don't want everybody knowing you've got a broomstick or they'll all want one. Oliver Wood will meet you tonight on the Quidditch field at seven o'clock for your first training session.

Professor M. McGonagall

Harry had difficulty hiding his glee as he handed the note to Ron to read.

"A Nimbus Two Thousand!" Ron moaned enviously. "I've never even *touched* one."

They left the hall quickly, wanting to unwrap the broomstick in private before their first class, but halfway across the entrance hall they found the way upstairs barred by Crabbe and Goyle. Malfoy seized the package from Harry and felt it.

"That's a broomstick," he said, throwing it back to Harry with a mixture of jealousy and spite on his face. "You'll be in for it this time, Potter, first years aren't allowed them."

Ron couldn't resist it.

“It’s not any old broomstick,” he said, “it’s a Nimbus Two Thousand. What did you say you’ve got at home, Malfoy, a Comet Two Sixty?” Ron grinned at Harry. “Comets look flashy, but they’re not in the same league as the Nimbus.”

“What would you know about it, Weasley, you couldn’t afford half the handle,” Malfoy snapped back. “I suppose you and your brothers have to save up twig by twig.”

Before Ron could answer, Professor Flitwick appeared at Malfoy’s elbow.

“Not arguing, I hope, boys?” he squeaked.

“Potter’s been sent a broomstick, Professor,” said Malfoy quickly.

“Yes, yes, that’s right,” said Professor Flitwick, beaming at Harry. “Professor McGonagall told me all about the special circumstances, Potter. And what model is it?”

“A Nimbus Two Thousand, sir,” said Harry, fighting not to laugh at the look of horror on Malfoy’s face. “And it’s really thanks to Malfoy here that I’ve got it,” he added.

Harry and Ron headed upstairs, smothering their laughter at Malfoy’s obvious rage and confusion.

“Well, it’s true,” Harry chortled as they reached the top of the marble staircase, “If he hadn’t stolen Neville’s Remembrall I wouldn’t be on the team . . .”

“So I suppose you think that’s a reward for breaking rules?” came an angry voice from just behind them. Hermione was stomping up the stairs, looking disapprovingly at the package in Harry’s hand.

“I thought you weren’t speaking to us?” said Harry.

“Yes, don’t stop now,” said Ron, “it’s doing us so much good.”

Hermione marched away with her nose in the air.

Harry had a lot of trouble keeping his mind on his lessons that day. It kept wandering up to the dormitory where his new broomstick was lying under his bed, or straying off to the Quidditch field where he'd be learning to play that night. He bolted his dinner that evening without noticing what he was eating, and then rushed upstairs with Ron to unwrap the Nimbus Two Thousand at last.

"Wow," Ron sighed, as the broomstick rolled onto Harry's bedspread.

Even Harry, who knew nothing about the different brooms, thought it looked wonderful. Sleek and shiny, with a mahogany handle, it had a long tail of neat, straight twigs and Nimbus Two Thousand written in gold near the top.

As seven o'clock drew nearer, Harry left the castle and set off in the dusk toward the Quidditch field. He'd never been inside the stadium before. Hundreds of seats were raised in stands around the field so that the spectators were high enough to see what was going on. At either end of the field were three golden poles with hoops on the end. They reminded Harry of the little plastic sticks Muggle children blew bubbles through, except that they were fifty feet high.

Too eager to fly again to wait for Wood, Harry mounted his broomstick and kicked off from the ground. What a feeling — he swooped in and out of the goalposts and then sped up and down the field. The Nimbus Two Thousand turned wherever he wanted at his lightest touch.

"Hey, Potter, come down!"

Oliver Wood had arrived. He was carrying a large wooden crate

under his arm. Harry landed next to him.

“Very nice,” said Wood, his eyes glinting. “I see what McGonagall meant . . . you really are a natural. I’m just going to teach you the rules this evening, then you’ll be joining team practice three times a week.”

He opened the crate. Inside were four different-sized balls.

“Right,” said Wood. “Now, Quidditch is easy enough to understand, even if it’s not too easy to play. There are seven players on each side. Three of them are called Chasers.”

“Three Chasers,” Harry repeated, as Wood took out a bright red ball about the size of a soccer ball.

“This ball’s called the Quaffle,” said Wood. “The Chasers throw the Quaffle to each other and try and get it through one of the hoops to score a goal. Ten points every time the Quaffle goes through one of the hoops. Follow me?”

“The Chasers throw the Quaffle and put it through the hoops to score,” Harry recited. “So — that’s sort of like basketball on broomsticks with six hoops, isn’t it?”

“What’s basketball?” said Wood curiously.

“Never mind,” said Harry quickly.

“Now, there’s another player on each side who’s called the Keeper — I’m Keeper for Gryffindor. I have to fly around our hoops and stop the other team from scoring.”

“Three Chasers, one Keeper,” said Harry, who was determined to remember it all. “And they play with the Quaffle. Okay, got that. So what are they for?” He pointed at the three balls left inside the box.

“I’ll show you now,” said Wood. “Take this.”

He handed Harry a small club, a bit like a short baseball bat.

“I’m going to show you what the Bludgers do,” Wood said. “These two are the Bludgers.”

He showed Harry two identical balls, jet black and slightly smaller than the red Quaffle. Harry noticed that they seemed to be straining to escape the straps holding them inside the box.

“Stand back,” Wood warned Harry. He bent down and freed one of the Bludgers.

At once, the black ball rose high in the air and then pelted straight at Harry’s face. Harry swung at it with the bat to stop it from breaking his nose, and sent it zigzagging away into the air — it zoomed around their heads and then shot at Wood, who dived on top of it and managed to pin it to the ground.

“See?” Wood panted, forcing the struggling Bludger back into the crate and strapping it down safely. “The Bludgers rocket around, trying to knock players off their brooms. That’s why you have two Beaters on each team — the Weasley twins are ours — it’s their job to protect their side from the Bludgers and try and knock them toward the other team. So — think you’ve got all that?”

“Three Chasers try and score with the Quaffle; the Keeper guards the goalposts; the Beaters keep the Bludgers away from their team,” Harry reeled off.

“Very good,” said Wood.

“Er — have the Bludgers ever killed anyone?” Harry asked, hoping he sounded offhand.

“Never at Hogwarts. We’ve had a couple of broken jaws but nothing worse than that. Now, the last member of the team is the

Seeker. That's you. And you don't have to worry about the Quaffle or the Bludgers —"

"— unless they crack my head open."

"Don't worry, the Weasleys are more than a match for the Bludgers — I mean, they're like a pair of human Bludgers themselves."

Wood reached into the crate and took out the fourth and last ball. Compared with the Quaffle and the Bludgers, it was tiny, about the size of a large walnut. It was bright gold and had little fluttering silver wings.

"*This*," said Wood, "is the Golden Snitch, and it's the most important ball of the lot. It's very hard to catch because it's so fast and difficult to see. It's the Seeker's job to catch it. You've got to weave in and out of the Chasers, Beaters, Bludgers, and Quaffle to get it before the other team's Seeker, because whichever Seeker catches the Snitch wins his team an extra hundred and fifty points, so they nearly always win. That's why Seekers get fouled so much. A game of Quidditch only ends when the Snitch is caught, so it can go on for ages — I think the record is three months, they had to keep bringing on substitutes so the players could get some sleep.

"Well, that's it — any questions?"

Harry shook his head. He understood what he had to do all right, it was doing it that was going to be the problem.

"We won't practice with the Snitch yet," said Wood, carefully shutting it back inside the crate, "it's too dark, we might lose it. Let's try you out with a few of these."

He pulled a bag of ordinary golf balls out of his pocket and a few minutes later, he and Harry were up in the air, Wood throwing the

golf balls as hard as he could in every direction for Harry to catch.

Harry didn't miss a single one, and Wood was delighted. After half an hour, night had really fallen and they couldn't carry on.

"That Quidditch Cup'll have our name on it this year," said Wood happily as they trudged back up to the castle. "I wouldn't be surprised if you turn out better than Charlie Weasley, and he could have played for England if he hadn't gone off chasing dragons."

Perhaps it was because he was now so busy, what with Quidditch practice three evenings a week on top of all his homework, but Harry could hardly believe it when he realized that he'd already been at Hogwarts two months. The castle felt more like home than Privet Drive ever had. His lessons, too, were becoming more and more interesting now that they had mastered the basics.

On Halloween morning they woke to the delicious smell of baking pumpkin wafting through the corridors. Even better, Professor Flitwick announced in Charms that he thought they were ready to start making objects fly, something they had all been dying to try since they'd seen him make Neville's toad zoom around the classroom. Professor Flitwick put the class into pairs to practice. Harry's partner was Seamus Finnigan (which was a relief, because Neville had been trying to catch his eye). Ron, however, was to be working with Hermione Granger. It was hard to tell whether Ron or Hermione was angrier about this. She hadn't spoken to either of them since the day Harry's broomstick had arrived.

"Now, don't forget that nice wrist movement we've been practicing!" squeaked Professor Flitwick, perched on top of his pile of books as usual. "Swish and flick, remember, swish and flick. And

saying the magic words properly is very important, too — never forget Wizard Baruffio, who said ‘s’ instead of ‘f’ and found himself on the floor with a buffalo on his chest.”

It was very difficult. Harry and Seamus swished and flicked, but the feather they were supposed to be sending skyward just lay on the desktop. Seamus got so impatient that he prodded it with his wand and set fire to it — Harry had to put it out with his hat.

Ron, at the next table, wasn’t having much more luck.

“*Wingardium Leviosa!*” he shouted, waving his long arms like a windmill.

“You’re saying it wrong,” Harry heard Hermione snap. “It’s *Wing-gar-dium Levi-o-sa*, make the ‘gar’ nice and long.”

“You do it, then, if you’re so clever,” Ron snarled.

Hermione rolled up the sleeves of her gown, flicked her wand, and said, “*Wingardium Leviosa!*”

Their feather rose off the desk and hovered about four feet above their heads.

“Oh, well done!” cried Professor Flitwick, clapping. “Everyone see here, Miss Granger’s done it!”

Ron was in a very bad mood by the end of the class.

“It’s no wonder no one can stand her,” he said to Harry as they pushed their way into the crowded corridor, “she’s a nightmare, honestly.”

Someone knocked into Harry as they hurried past him. It was Hermione. Harry caught a glimpse of her face — and was startled to see that she was in tears.

“I think she heard you.”

“So?” said Ron, but he looked a bit uncomfortable. “She must’ve noticed she’s got no friends.”

Hermione didn’t turn up for the next class and wasn’t seen all afternoon. On their way down to the Great Hall for the Halloween feast, Harry and Ron overheard Parvati Patil telling her friend Lavender that Hermione was crying in the girls’ bathroom and wanted to be left alone. Ron looked still more awkward at this, but a moment later they had entered the Great Hall, where the Halloween decorations put Hermione out of their minds.

A thousand live bats fluttered from the walls and ceiling while a thousand more swooped over the tables in low black clouds, making the candles in the pumpkins stutter. The feast appeared suddenly on the golden plates, as it had at the start-of-term banquet.

Harry was just helping himself to a baked potato when Professor Quirrell came sprinting into the hall, his turban askew and terror on his face. Everyone stared as he reached Professor Dumbledore’s chair, slumped against the table, and gasped, “Troll — in the dungeons — thought you ought to know.”

He then sank to the floor in a dead faint.

There was an uproar. It took several purple firecrackers exploding from the end of Professor Dumbledore’s wand to bring silence.

“Prefects,” he rumbled, “lead your Houses back to the dormitories immediately!”

Percy was in his element.

“Follow me! Stick together, first years! No need to fear the troll if you follow my orders! Stay close behind me, now. Make way, first years coming through! Excuse me, I’m a prefect!”

“How could a troll get in?” Harry asked as they climbed the stairs.

“Don’t ask me, they’re supposed to be really stupid,” said Ron.

“Maybe Peeves let it in for a Halloween joke.”

They passed different groups of people hurrying in different directions. As they jostled their way through a crowd of confused Hufflepuffs, Harry suddenly grabbed Ron’s arm.

“I’ve just thought — Hermione.”

“What about her?”

“She doesn’t know about the troll.”

Ron bit his lip.

“Oh, all right,” he snapped. “But Percy’d better not see us.”

Ducking down, they joined the Hufflepuffs going the other way, slipped down a deserted side corridor, and hurried off toward the girls’ bathroom. They had just turned the corner when they heard quick footsteps behind them.

“Percy!” hissed Ron, pulling Harry behind a large stone griffin.

Peering around it, however, they saw not Percy but Snape. He crossed the corridor and disappeared from view.

“What’s he doing?” Harry whispered. “Why isn’t he down in the dungeons with the rest of the teachers?”

“Search me.”

Quietly as possible, they crept along the next corridor after Snape’s fading footsteps.

“He’s heading for the third floor,” Harry said, but Ron held up his hand.

“Can you smell something?”

Harry sniffed and a foul stench reached his nostrils, a mixture of

old socks and the kind of public toilet no one seems to clean.

And then they heard it — a low grunting, and the shuffling footfalls of gigantic feet. Ron pointed — at the end of a passage to the left, something huge was moving toward them. They shrank into the shadows and watched as it emerged into a patch of moonlight.

It was a horrible sight. Twelve feet tall, its skin was a dull, granite gray, its great lumpy body like a boulder with its small bald head perched on top like a coconut. It had short legs thick as tree trunks with flat, horny feet. The smell coming from it was incredible. It was holding a huge wooden club, which dragged along the floor because its arms were so long.

The troll stopped next to a doorway and peered inside. It wagged its long ears, making up its tiny mind, then slouched slowly into the room.

“The key’s in the lock,” Harry muttered. “We could lock it in.”

“Good idea,” said Ron nervously.

They edged toward the open door, mouths dry, praying the troll wasn’t about to come out of it. With one great leap, Harry managed to grab the key, slam the door, and lock it.

“Yes!”

Flushed with their victory, they started to run back up the passage, but as they reached the corner they heard something that made their hearts stop — a high, petrified scream — and it was coming from the chamber they’d just chained up.

“Oh, no,” said Ron, pale as the Bloody Baron.

“It’s the girls’ bathroom!” Harry gasped.

“Hermione!” they said together.

It was the last thing they wanted to do, but what choice did they have? Wheeling around, they sprinted back to the door and turned the key, fumbling in their panic. Harry pulled the door open and they ran inside.

Hermione Granger was shrinking against the wall opposite, looking as if she was about to faint. The troll was advancing on her, knocking the sinks off the walls as it went.

“Confuse it!” Harry said desperately to Ron, and, seizing a tap, he threw it as hard as he could against the wall.

The troll stopped a few feet from Hermione. It lumbered around, blinking stupidly, to see what had made the noise. Its mean little eyes saw Harry. It hesitated, then made for him instead, lifting its club as it went.

“Oy, pea-brain!” yelled Ron from the other side of the chamber, and he threw a metal pipe at it. The troll didn’t even seem to notice the pipe hitting its shoulder, but it heard the yell and paused again, turning its ugly snout toward Ron instead, giving Harry time to run around it.

“Come on, run, *run!*” Harry yelled at Hermione, trying to pull her toward the door, but she couldn’t move, she was still flat against the wall, her mouth open with terror.

The shouting and the echoes seemed to be driving the troll berserk. It roared again and started toward Ron, who was nearest and had no way to escape.

Harry then did something that was both very brave and very stupid: He took a great running jump and managed to fasten his arms around the troll’s neck from behind. The troll couldn’t feel Harry

hanging there, but even a troll will notice if you stick a long bit of wood up its nose, and Harry's wand had still been in his hand when he'd jumped — it had gone straight up one of the troll's nostrils.

Howling with pain, the troll twisted and flailed its club, with Harry clinging on for dear life; any second, the troll was going to rip him off or catch him a terrible blow with the club.

Hermione had sunk to the floor in fright; Ron pulled out his own wand — not knowing what he was going to do he heard himself cry the first spell that came into his head: "*Wingardium Leviosa!*"

The club flew suddenly out of the troll's hand, rose high, high up into the air, turned slowly over — and dropped, with a sickening crack, onto its owner's head. The troll swayed on the spot and then fell flat on its face, with a thud that made the whole room tremble.

Harry got to his feet. He was shaking and out of breath. Ron was standing there with his wand still raised, staring at what he had done.

It was Hermione who spoke first.

"Is it — dead?"

"I don't think so," said Harry, "I think it's just been knocked out."

He bent down and pulled his wand out of the troll's nose. It was covered in what looked like lumpy gray glue.

"Urgh — troll boogers."

He wiped it on the troll's trousers.

A sudden slamming and loud footsteps made the three of them look up. They hadn't realized what a racket they had been making, but of course, someone downstairs must have heard the crashes and the troll's roars. A moment later, Professor McGonagall had come bursting into the room, closely followed by Snape, with Quirrell

bringing up the rear. Quirrell took one look at the troll, let out a faint whimper, and sat quickly down on a toilet, clutching his heart.

Snape bent over the troll. Professor McGonagall was looking at Ron and Harry. Harry had never seen her look so angry. Her lips were white. Hopes of winning fifty points for Gryffindor faded quickly from Harry's mind.

"What on earth were you thinking of?" said Professor McGonagall, with cold fury in her voice. Harry looked at Ron, who was still standing with his wand in the air. "You're lucky you weren't killed. Why aren't you in your dormitory?"

Snape gave Harry a swift, piercing look. Harry looked at the floor. He wished Ron would put his wand down.

Then a small voice came out of the shadows.

"Please, Professor McGonagall — they were looking for me."

"Miss Granger!"

Hermione had managed to get to her feet at last.

"I went looking for the troll because I — I thought I could deal with it on my own — you know, because I've read all about them."

Ron dropped his wand. Hermione Granger, telling a downright lie to a teacher?

"If they hadn't found me, I'd be dead now. Harry stuck his wand up its nose and Ron knocked it out with its own club. They didn't have time to come and fetch anyone. It was about to finish me off when they arrived."

Harry and Ron tried to look as though this story wasn't new to them.

"Well — in that case . . ." said Professor McGonagall, staring at

the three of them, “Miss Granger, you foolish girl, how could you think of tackling a mountain troll on your own?”

Hermione hung her head. Harry was speechless. Hermione was the last person to do anything against the rules, and here she was, pretending she had, to get them out of trouble. It was as if Snape had started handing out sweets.

“Miss Granger, five points will be taken from Gryffindor for this,” said Professor McGonagall. “I’m very disappointed in you. If you’re not hurt at all, you’d better get off to Gryffindor Tower. Students are finishing the feast in their Houses.”

Hermione left.

Professor McGonagall turned to Harry and Ron.

“Well, I still say you were lucky, but not many first years could have taken on a full-grown mountain troll. You each win Gryffindor five points. Professor Dumbledore will be informed of this. You may go.”

They hurried out of the chamber and didn’t speak at all until they had climbed two floors up. It was a relief to be away from the smell of the troll, quite apart from anything else.

“We should have gotten more than ten points,” Ron grumbled.

“Five, you mean, once she’s taken off Hermione’s.”

“Good of her to get us out of trouble like that,” Ron admitted. “Mind you, we *did* save her.”

“She might not have needed saving if we hadn’t locked the thing in with her,” Harry reminded him.

They had reached the portrait of the Fat Lady.

“Pig snout,” they said and entered.

The common room was packed and noisy. Everyone was eating the food that had been sent up. Hermione, however, stood alone by the door, waiting for them. There was a very embarrassed pause. Then, none of them looking at each other, they all said “Thanks,” and hurried off to get plates.

But from that moment on, Hermione Granger became their friend. There are some things you can’t share without ending up liking each other, and knocking out a twelve-foot mountain troll is one of them.

Allerheiligeaand

Die volgende dag kan Malfoy duidelik nie sy oë glo toe hy sien dat Harry en Ron nog steeds in Hogwarts is en dat hulle, hoewel moeg, heeltemal vrolik lyk nie. Teen hierdie tyd voel dit vir Harry en Ron of die ontmoeting met die driekoppige hond 'n wonderlike avontuur was en is hulle heeltemal lus vir nog. Harry het Ron intussen vertel van die pakkie wat skynbaar van Edelgolt na Hogwarts verskuif is en hulle praat ure lank oor wat tog so goed beskerm moet word.

“Dis óf baie kosbaar óf baie gevaarlik,” sê Ron.

“Of albei,” sê Harry.

Ongelukkig weet hulle niks meer oor die geheimsinnige pakkie as dat dit omtrent tien sentimeter lank is nie, en hulle het heeltemal te min leidrade om te kan raai wat dit is.

Nóg Neville, nóg Hermien stel belang in wat onder die hond en onder die valdeur is. Neville wil net nooit weer naby die hond kom nie.

Hermien weier om met Harry en Ron te praat, maar sy is so 'n baas-spelerige klein betersweter dat dit 'n wonderlike bonus is. Al wat hulle nou wil hê, is 'n manier om vir Malfoy terug te betaal en tot hul groot vreugde kom juis so iets 'n week later in die pos.

Toe die uile soos gewoonlik die Groot Saal binnevlieg, sien almal dadelik die lang dun pakkie wat deur ses groot steenuile gedra word. Harry is net so nuuskierig as die ander om te weet wat daarin is en is heel verwilderd toe die uile die pakkie voor hom neergooi sodat sy spek skoon van sy bord afval. Hulle het skaars weggefladder of nog 'n uil gooi 'n brief bo-op die pakkie. Harry skeur die brief eerste oop, wat 'n geluiskoot is, want dit sê:

MOENIE HIERDIE PAKKIE AAN TAFEL OOPMAAK NIE.

Dit bevat jou nuwe Nimbus Tweeduisend,

maar ek wil nie hê almal moet weet dat jy

'n besemstok kry nie, want dan sal almal een wil hê.

Oliver Wood sal jou vanaand om sewe-uur

op die Kwiddiek-veld ontmoet vir jou eerste oefensessie.

Professor M. McGonagall

Dis met groot moeite dat Harry sy gesig reguit hou toe hy die brief vir Ron gee om te lees.

“’n Nimbus Tweeduisend!” kla Ron jaloers. “Ek het nog nooit eens aan een geraak nie.”

Hulle stap vinnig uit sodat hulle die besemstok iewers eenkant kan oopmaak voor die eerste les begin, maar hulle is skaars halfpad oor die ingangsportaal of Krabbe en Goliat keer hulle by die trap. Malfoy gryp die pakkie uit Harry se hande en voel daaraan.

“Dis ’n besemstok,” sê hy en gooi dit terug na Harry met ’n mengsel van jaloesie en vermakerigheid op sy gesig. “Hierdie keer is jy lekker in die pekel, Potter, eerstejaars mag nie besems hê nie.”

Ron kan dit nie meer hou nie.

“Dis nie sommer enige ou besemstok nie,” sê hy, “dis ’n Nimbus Tweeduisend. Wat het jy nou weer gesê het jy by die huis, Malfoy, ’n Comet 260?” Ron grinnik vir Harry. “Comets lyk nogal goed, maar hulle kom nie naby die Nimbus-reeks nie.”

“Wat weet jy miskien, Weasley, jy kan nie eens die helfte van die stok bekostig nie,” kap Malfoy terug. “Jy en jou broers koop dit seker grassie vir grassie.”

Voor Ron kan antwoord, verskyn professor Flickerpitt langs Malfoy.

“Hoop nie julle is aan die stry nie, seuns,” piep hy.

“Potter het ’n besem gekry, professor,” sê Malfoy vinnig.

“Ja, ja, dis reg,” sê professor Flickerpitt en hy straal in Harry se rigting. “Professor McGonagall het my van die spesiale omstandighede vertel, Potter. En watter model is dit?”

“’n Nimbus Tweeduisend, professor,” sê Harry terwyl hy veg om nie te lag oor die uitdrukking van skok op Malfoy se gesig nie. “Eintlik is dit te danke aan Malfoy dat ek dit gekry het,” voeg hy by.

Harry en Ron storm teen die trappe uit, terwyl hulle hul bes doen om nie uit te bars van die lag oor Malfoy se klaarblyklike woede en verwarring nie.

“Maar dis die waarheid,” proes Harry toe hulle die bokant van die marmertappe bereik. “As hy nie Neville se Onthouer gesteel het nie, was ek nooit in die span . . .”

“Nou dink jy seker dis ’n beloning omdat jy die reëls oortree het?” hoor hulle ’n kwaai stem net agter hulle. Dis Hermien wat die trappe op gesteun kom en vol afkeuring na die pakkie in Harry se hande staar.

“Ek dag jy praat nie met ons nie?” sê Harry.

“Ja, moenie nou ophou nie,” sê Ron, “ons hou daarvan.”

Hermien marsjeer neus in die lug verby hulle.

Dis met groot moeite dat Harry daardie dag sy gedagtes by sy lesse hou. Hulle dwaal die hele tyd na die slaapsaal waar sy nuwe besem onder sy bed lê, of na die Kwiddiek-veld waar hy daardie aand gaan begin leer

hoe om te speel. Hy verorber sy aandete sonder dat hy sien wat dit is en storm boontoe saam met Ron om die Nimbus Tweeduisend uit die pakkie te haal.

“Sjoe,” sug Ron toe die besemstok uitrol op Harry se deken.

Selfs Harry wat niks van besems af weet nie, dink dit lyk wonderlik. Dis sierlik en skitterblink met ’n mahoniesteel, en het ’n lang stert van netjiese reguit gras en met Nimbus Tweeduisend in goud aan die kant geskryf.

Skuins voor sewe verlaat Harry die kasteel en stap in die rigting van die Kwiddiek-veld. Hy was nog nooit tevore in die stadion nie. Daar is honderde sitplekke op pawiljoene wat hoog genoeg is dat die toeskouers die wedstryd kan sien. By elke doellyn is drie goue pale, elk met ’n hoepel aan die punt. Hulle laat Harry dink aan die klein plastiekstokkies waardeur Moggelkinders seepbelle blaas, behalwe dat hulle twintig meter lank is.

Harry is te gretig om weer te vlieg om vir Wood te wil wag. Hy klim op sy besem en skop weg. Wat ’n sensasie – hy swiep heen en weer tussen die doelpale en vlieg om en om die veld. Die Nimbus Tweeduisend draai met die ligste aanraking net waar hy wil wees.

“Haai, Potter, kom af!”

Oliver Wood is daar. Hy dra ’n groterige houtkrat onder sy arm. Harry land reg langs hom.

“Baie goed,” sê Wood en sy oë glinster. “Ek sien wat McGonagall bedoel . . . dis aangebore. Vanaand sal ek jou die reëls leer, daarna oefen jy saam met die span, drie keer per week.”

Hy maak die krat oop. Binne-in is vier balle van verskillende groottes.

“Reg,” sê Wood. “Nou, Kwiddiek is maklik genoeg om te verstaan, hoewel dit nie maklik is om te speel nie. Daar is sewe spelers aan elke kant. Drie van hulle word Jaers genoem.”

“Drie Jaers,” herhaal Harry terwyl Wood ’n blinkrooi bal, omtrent so groot soos ’n sokkerbal, uithaal.

“Dit is die Swelger,” sê Wood. “Die Jaers gooi die Swelger vir mekaar en probeer dit deur een van die hoepels gooi om ’n doel te kry. Elke keer dat die Swelger deur ’n hoepel gaan, kry die span tien punte. Verstaan jy?”

“Die Jaers probeer die Swelger deur die hoepels kry vir ’n doel,” herhaal Harry. “Dus so ’n bietjie soos basketbal op besems met ses hoepels, of hoe?”

“Wat is basketbal?” vra Wood nuuskierig.

“Toemaar,” sê Harry vinnig.

“Nou, aan elke kant is daar een speler wat die Wagter genoem word – ek is Wagter vir Griffindor. Ek vlieg rond tussen die hoepels en keer dat die ander span ’n doel kry.”

“Drie Jaers en een Wagter,” sê Harry wat vasberade is om alles te onthou. “En hulle speel met ’n Swelger. Goed, ek het dit. So, waarvoor is dit?” Hy wys na die drie balle wat nog steeds in die krat lê.

“Ek sal jou nou wys,” sê Wood. “Vat hier.”

Hy gee vir Harry ’n klein kolf, baie soos dié waarmee ’n mens bosbal speel.

“Ek gaan jou nou wys wat die Mokers doen,” sê Wood. “Hierdie twee is Mokers.”

Hy wys na twee identiese balle, pikswart en effens kleiner as die rooi Swelger. Harry sien hoe beur hulle teen die bande wat hulle in die krat hou.

“Staan terug,” waarsku Wood. Hy buk en maak een van die Mokers los.

Die swart bal styg onmiddellik hoog op in die lug en pyl dan reguit op Harry se gesig af. Harry swaai met die kolf om te keer dat dit sy neus breek. Hy stuur die Moker op ’n sigsag-koers die lug in – dit zoem om hul koppe en skiet dan na Wood wat daarop duik en dit teen die grond vaspen.

“Sien?” Wood hyg na asem. Hy dwing die worstelende Moker terug in die krat en gord dit stewig vas. “Die Mokers vlieg rond en probeer spelers van hul besems af slaan. Dis hoekom daar twee Brekers is – die Weasley-tweeling is ons s’n – dis hul werk om hul kant teen die Mokers te beskerm en hulle na die ander span te slaan. So – het jy dit?”

“Drie Jaers wat doele probeer kry met die Swelger; die Wagter wat die doelpale oppas; die Brekers wat die Mokers weghou van hul span,” rammel Harry af.

“Baie goed,” sê Wood.

“H’m – het die Mokers al ooit iemand doodgemaak?” vra Harry en probeer ongeërg klink.

“Nog nie by Hogwarts nie. Ons het al ’n paar gebreekte kakebene gehad, maar niks erger nie. Nou, die laaste lid van die span is die Soeker. Dis jy. En jy hoef jou glad nie oor die Swelger of die Mokers te bekommer nie –”

“– behalwe as hulle my skedel kraak.”

“Ag nee, man, die Weasleys is meer as mans genoeg vir die Mokers – hulle is twee Mokers in menslike vorm.”

Weer steek Wood sy hand in die krat en haal die vierde en laaste bal uit. In vergelyking met die Swelger en die Mokers is dit klein, omtrent so groot soos ’n okkerneut. Dit is helder goudkleurig en het klein, fladderende silwer vlerkies.

“Dit,” sê Wood, “is die Goue Snip en dis die belangrikste bal van almal. Dis baie moeilik om dit te vang omdat dit so vinnig en so moeilik is om te sien. Dis die Soeker se werk om dit te vang. Jy moet in en uit

weef tussen die Jaers, Brekers, Mokkers en die Swelger en die Snip kry voor die ander span se Soeker dit kan kry, want die span wie se Soeker die Goue Snip eerste vang, kry 'n ekstra honderd-en-vyftig punte, sodat daardie span feitlik altyd wen. Dis hoekom die Soekers so dikwels beseer word weens vuilspel. 'n Kwiddiek-wedstryd eindig eers wanneer die Snip gevang is, so dit kan eeue lank aanhou – ek dink die rekord is drie maande, hulle moes aanhou nuwe spelers op die veld bring sodat die ander spelers kan rus. Het jy enige vrae?”

Harry skud sy kop. Hy verstaan wat hy moet doen; dis om dit te doen wat die probleem gaan wees.

“Ons sal nie nou al met die Snip oefen nie,” sê Wood en maak dit versigtig toe binne-in die krat, “dis te donker, netnou verloor ons dit. Kom ons probeer 'n paar van dié.”

Hy haal 'n sak vol gewone gholfballe uit en 'n paar minute later is hy en Harry bo in die lug. Wood gooi die balle so hard as wat hy kan en in enige denkbare rigting vir Harry om te vang.

Harry mis nie 'n enkele bal nie en Wood is in sy noppies. 'n Halfuur later het die son gesak en is dit so donker dat hulle nie verder kan oefen nie.

“Vanjaar staan daar Griffindor op die Kwiddiek-beker,” sê Wood tevrede terwyl hulle terugstap kasteel toe. “Ek sal nie verbaas wees as jy beter is as Charlie Weasley nie en hy kon vir Engeland gespeel het as hy nie gaan drake jag het nie.”

Dis dalk omdat hy so besig is met Kwiddiek drie aande van die week, bo en behalwe sy huiswerk, dat Harry skaars kan glo dat hy al meer as twee maande in Hogwarts is. Die kasteel is meer van 'n tuiste as wat die huis in Ligusterlaan ooit was. Sy lesse raak ook al hoe interessanter nou dat hy die basiese beginsels bemeester het.

Op die oggend van Allerheiligeaand word hulle wakker met die geur van gebakte pampoen wat deur die gange sweef. Nog beter, tydens die Towerspel-les kondig professor Flickerpitt aan dat hulle gereed is om voorwerpe te laat vlieg, iets wat hulle brand om te doen sedert hulle gesien het hoe hy Neville se padda in die klaskamer laat rondvlieg. Professor Flickerpitt deel hulle op sodat hulle in pare kan oefen. Harry se maat is Septimus Floris (wat 'n verligting is, want Neville het sy oog probeer vang). Ron moet egter saam met Hermien la Grange werk. Dis moeilik om te sê wie van Ron of Hermien die kwaadste is. Sedert die dag toe Harry se besemstok gekom het, het sy nog nie 'n woord met hulle gepraat nie.

“Moenie daardie oulike gewrigsbeweging wat ons so geoefen het, vergeet nie!” piep professor Flickerpitt, wat soos gewoonlik bo-op sy stapel boeke staan. “Swiep en piets, onthou, swiep en piets. En dis belangrik

om die towerwoorde behoorlik te sê – moenie vergeet van Towenaar Baruffio wat 't gesê het pleks van 'p' en die volgende oomblik plat op die grond gelê het met 'n buffel bo-op hom nie.”

Dit is bitter moeilik. Harry en Septimus swiep en piets, maar die veer wat hulle die lug in moet stuur, bly net daar op die tafel lê. Septimus word so ongeduldig dat hy dit met sy towerstaf aanpor en per ongeluk aan die brand steek – Harry moet dit blus met sy hoed.

Ron, by die tafel langsaan, vaar niks beter nie.

“*Wingardium Leviosa!*” skree hy en waai sy lang arms soos 'n windmeul.

“Jy sê dit heeltemal verkeerd,” hoor Harry vir Hermien snou. “Dis *Wing-gar-dium Levi-o-sa*, met die ‘gar’ lekker uitgerek.”

“Doen jy dit dan as jy so slim is,” jak Ron haar af.

Hermien rol haar moue op, piets met haar towerstaf en sê, “*Wingardium Leviosa!*”

Die veer styg die lug in en hang omtrent 'n meter bo hul koppe.

“Mooi so!” roep professor Flickerpitt uit en klap sy hande. “Kom kyk hier, almal van julle, juffrou La Grange het dit reggekry!”

Aan die einde van die klas is Ron in 'n vieslike bui.

“Dis g'n wonder dat niemand van haar hou nie,” sê hy vir Harry terwyl hulle deur die malende mense in die gang beur, “sy's 'n nagmerrie, rêrig.”

Iemand stamp teen Harry toe hulle verby hom druk. Dis Hermien. Harry vang 'n glimp van haar gesig – en is verbaas om te sien dat sy in tranes is.

“Ek dink sy't jou gehoor.”

“So?” sê Ron, maar hy lyk bietjie ongemaklik. “Sy't darem seker al agtergekom dat sy geen vriende het nie.”

Hermien daag nie op vir die volgende klas nie en die hele middag sien hulle haar nêrens nie. Op pad na die Groot Saal vir die Allerheiligefees hoor Harry en Ron hoe Parvati Patel vir haar vriendin Hildegard vertel dat Hermien in die meisies se toilette sit en huil en alleen wil wees. Ron lyk nog meer ongemaklik toe hy dit hoor, maar 'n oomblik later stap hulle die Groot Saal binne en die versierings verdryf alle gedagtes aan Hermien uit hul koppe.

'n Duisend lewende vlermuise fladder teen die mure en teen die plafon, terwyl nog 'n duisend in lae swart wolke oor die tafels swiep sodat die kerse in die pampoene flikker. Die feesmaal verskyn plotseling op goue borde, net soos tydens die banket aan die begin van die kwartaal.

Harry is besig om vir homself aartappels in te skep toe professor Quirrell die saal binnestorm. Sy tulband sit skeef en sy gesig is vertrek van skok. Almal staar toe hy na professor Dompeldorius se stoel strompel, oor die tafel sak en hortend sê, “Trol – in die kerkers – dag julle moet weet.”

Toe sink hy neer in 'n doodse beswyming.

Daar is 'n oproer. Dit kos etlike pers klappers uit professor Dompeldorius se towerstaf voor almal uiteindelik stil is.

"Prefekte," brom hy, "lei jul Huise terug na die slaapsale. Onmiddellik!"

Percy is in sy element.

"Volg my! Bly bymekaar, eerstejaars! Nie nodig om bang te wees vir die trol nie, solank julle my bevele gehoorsaam! Bly kort agter my. Gee pad, eerstejaars moet uitkom! Verskoon my, ek is 'n prefek!"

"Hoe kan 'n trol inkom?" vra Harry terwyl hulle die trappe klim.

"Moenie vir my vra nie. Hulle is veronderstel om ontsettend dom te wees," sê Ron. "Dalk het Nurks hom laat inkom vir 'n soort Allerheilige-grap."

Hulle stap verby verskeie groepe mense wat in alle rigtings skarrel. Toe hulle deur 'n menigte verwilderde Hoesenproesers druk, gryp Harry skielik Ron se arm.

"Ek dink nou net – Hermien."

"Wat van haar?"

"Sy weet nie van die trol nie."

Ron byt sy lip.

"Goed dan," brom hy, "maar Percy moet ons nie sien nie."

Hulle koes weg en volg die Hoesenproesers in die teenoorgestelde rigting, glip deur 'n verlate sygang en laat vat na die meisies se kleedkamer. Hulle gaan net om die hoek toe hulle voetstappe agter hulle hoor.

"Percy!" sis Ron en pluk Harry agter 'n groot klipgriffioen in.

Toe hulle om die kant loer, sien hulle nie vir Percy nie, maar vir Snerp. Hy stap oor die gang en verdwyn buite sig.

"Wat maak hy?" fluister Harry. "Hoekom is hy nie in die kerkers saam met die res van die onderwysers nie?"

"Hoe moet ek weet?"

So soetjies moontlik sluip hulle af in die volgende gang, al agter Snerp se dowwer wordende voetstappe aan.

"Hy's op pad na die derde verdieping," sê Harry, maar Ron hou sy hand in die lug.

"Ruik jy dit?"

Harry trek sy asem diep in en 'n vreeslike stank laat hom amper flou word, 'n mengsel van ou sokkies en die soort openbare toilet wat niemand ooit skoonmaak nie.

Toe hoor hulle dit – 'n dowwe gesnork en die skuifelende voetval van reusagtige voete. Ron wys – aan die end van die gang na links, is iets ysliks groots op pad in hul rigting. Hulle krimp weg in die skaduwees en staar verskrik toe die ding deur 'n kol maanlig stap.

Dis 'n aaklige gesig. Goed vier meter hoog, die vel 'n dowwe vaalgrys kleur, die logge liggaam 'n yslike granietrots met 'n klein kaal koppie

soos 'n kokosneut bo-op. Die trol het kort bene so dik soos boomstamme en plat, horingagtige pote. Die stank wat uit hom slaan, is iets afgrysliks. Hy sleep 'n tamaai groot houtknuppel agter hom oor die vloer, so lank is sy arms.

In die volgende deur steek die trol vas en loer na binne. Hy wikkel sy lang ore, asof hy oor iets dink, toe strompel hy na binne.

“Die sleutel is in die slot,” mompel Harry. “Ons kan hom toesluit.”

“Goeie plan,” sê Ron senuagtig.

Plat teen die muur skuifel hulle in die rigting van die oop deur. Met droë monde bid hulle dat die trol tog net nie nou moet uitkom nie. Toe, met een allemintige sprong, gryp Harry die sleutel, stamp die deur toe en sluit dit.

“Jissou!”

Gloeiend van opwinding oor hul oorwinning, storm hulle in die gang af, maar net voor hulle die hoek bereik, hoor hulle iets wat hul harte amper laat staan – 'n hoë, bloedstollende kreet – en dit kom uit die vertrek wat hulle so pas gesluit het.

“O nee,” sê Ron en hy word so bleek soos die Bloedige Baron.

“Dis die meisiestoilette!” Harry snak na asem.

“Hermien!” sê hulle tegelyk.

Dis die laaste ding wat hulle wil doen, maar hulle het nie 'n keuse nie. Hulle draai op hul hakke, laat spaander terug na die deur, draai die sleutel, sukkel onhandig in hul paniek – Harry pluk die deur oop – en hulle storm in.

Hermien la Grange het haarself plat teen die oorkantste muur gesmeur, dit lyk of sy gaan flou word. Die trol stommel nader en ruk wasbakke uit die mure so ver as hy loop.

“Verwar hom!” sê Harry desperaat vir Ron en hy raap 'n kraan op en gooi dit so hard as hy kan teen die muur.

Net 'n paar tree van Hermien af, steek die trol vas. Hy draai lomperig om en knipper sy dowwe oë om te sien waarvandaan die geraas gekom het. Sy gemene klein ogies sien vir Harry. Hy huiwer, toe lig hy sy knuppel hoog bo sy kop en strompel in Harry se rigting.

“Hoei, ertjiebrein!” gil Ron van die ander kant van die vertrek en gooi 'n metaalpyp na die trol. Dis duidelik dat die trol die pyp teen sy skouer skaars merk, maar die kreet hoor hy beslis. Hy steek vas en draai sy afskuwelike snoet in Ron se rigting, wat Harry die kans gee om om hom te nael.

“Komaan, hardloop, *hardloop*!” skree Harry vir Hermien en probeer haar na die deur toe trek, maar sy roer nie; sy staan nog steeds styf teen die muur, haar mond wyd oop van ang.

Dis of die geskree en die eggo's die trol heeltemal mal maak. Hy brul en mik na Ron wat naaste aan hom is en nie kan wegkom nie.

Toe doen Harry iets wat baie dapper maar ook baie dom is: hy raap

homself op en slaan sy arms van agter om die trol se nek. Die trol kan Harry skaars voel, maar selfs 'n trol sal agterkom as jy 'n stuk hout in sy neus opdruk. Harry se towerstaf was in sy hand toe hy spring – dit glip op in een van die trol se neusgate.

Die trol tjank van pyn, hy krul rond en slaan wild met sy knuppel, terwyl Harry om lewe en dood aan sy rug klou; enige oomblik gaan die trol hom afskud of hom 'n vreeslike hou met die knuppel gee.

Hermien lê plat op die grond so bang is sy; Ron pluk sy eie towerstaf uit – hy weet skaars wat hy doen. Hy sê die eerste towerspreuk wat in sy kop kom: “*Wingardium Leviosa!*”

Die knuppel vlieg uit die trol se hand, dit skiet hoër en hoër die lug in, draai stadig om – en val eensklaps met 'n mislike kraakgeluid op sy eienaar se kop. Die trol swaai op sy voete. Toe slaan hy neer, plat op sy gesig en met so 'n daverende slag dat die hele vertrek daarvan tril.

Harry steier orent. Hy bewe en hy is kortasem. Ron staan met sy towerstaf nog hoog bo sy kop en staar na sy handewerk.

Dis Hermien wat eerste praat.

“Is dit – dood?”

“Ek glo nie,” sê Harry, “ek dink hy's net bewusteloos.”

Hy buk en trek sy towerstaf uit die trol se neus. Dis bedek met iets soos klonterige grys gom.

“Jig – trolsnot.”

Hy vee dit aan die trol se broek af.

'n Skielike geslaan van deure en harde voetstappe laat die dристuks omkyk. Hulle het nie besef watter kabaal hulle opskop nie, maar iemand moet die geraas en die trol se gebrul gehoor het. 'n Oomblik later bars professor McGonagall die vertrek binne, met Snerp kort op haar hakke en Quirrell agterna. Quirrell gee een kyk na die trol, uiter 'n kreet, gryp na sy hart en sak neer op 'n toilet.

Snerp buig oor die trol. Professor McGonagall kyk na Harry en Ron. Harry het haar nog nooit so kwaad gesien nie. Haar lippe is wit. Alle hoop dat hulle vyftig punte vir Griffindor gaan wen, verdwyn uit Harry se gemoed.

“Wat op aarde dink julle doen julle?” sê professor McGonagall, haar stem koud van woede. Harry kyk na Ron wat nog steeds daar staan met sy towerstaf hoog in die lug. “Julle kan jul seëninge tel dat julle nie dood is nie. Hoekom is julle nie in julle slaapsaal nie?”

Snerp kyk priemend na Harry. Harry staar na die vloer. Hy wens Ron wil sy towerstaf laat sak.

Toe kom 'n klein stemmetjie uit die skaduwees.

“Asseblief, professor McGonagall – hulle het my kom soek.”

“Juffrou La Grangel”

Hermien het dit uiteindelik reggekry om op te staan.

“Ek het die trol gaan soek, want – want ek het gedink ek kan op my eie met hom afreken – u weet – omdat ek al so baie oor trolle gelees het.”

Ron se towerstaf sak. Hermien la Grange vertel ’n blatante leuen aan ’n onderwyser?

“As hulle my nie gekry het nie, was ek nou dood. Harry het sy towerstaf in die trol se neus gedruk en Ron het hom met sy eie knuppel bewusteloos geslaan. Hulle het nie tyd gehad om iemand te gaan roep nie. Die ding was op die punt om my dood te maak toe hulle hier kom.”

Harry en Ron probeer lyk asof die storie waar is.

“Wel – in daardie geval . . .” sê professor McGonagall en staar na die driestuks. “Juffrou La Grange, jou idiotiese kind, hoe kon jy dink dat jy ’n bergtrol vingeralleen kan takel?”

Hermien se kop hang. Harry is sprakeloos. Hermien is die laaste persoon wat die reëls sal oortree en hier staan en maak sy asof dit presies is wat sy gedoen het – om hul basse te red. Dis so goed of Snerp het skielik lekkers begin uitdeel.

“Juffrou La Grange, hiervoor verloor Griffindor vyf punte,” sê professor McGonagall. “Ek is baie teleurgesteld in jou. As jy nie beseer is nie, gaan dadelik terug na die Griffindor-toring. Die fees word in die huise afgehandel.”

Hermien stap uit.

Professor McGonagall draai na Harry en Ron.

“Wel, die geluk was beslis aan julle kant, maar tog is daar min eerstejaars wat ’n uitgegroeide bergtrol sou probeer takel. Julle verdien hiermee vyf punte elk vir Griffindor. Professor Dompeldorius sal ingelig word hieroor. Julle kan gaan.”

Hulle haas hulle uit die vertrek en praat eers toe hulle twee verdiepings hoër is. Dis ’n verligting om ver weg te wees van die reuk van die trol, dis nou buiten al die ander dinge.

“Ons moes meer as tien punte gekry het,” brom Ron.

“Vyf, bedoel jy, as Hermien s’n af is.”

“Dit was nogal orraait van haar om ons uit die moeilikheid te help,” gee Ron toe. “Maar ons *het* haar gered.”

“Dit sou seker nie nodig gewees het om haar te red as ons nie die trol saam met haar toegesluit het nie,” herinner Harry hom.

Hulle is by die portret van die Vet Vrou.

“Varksnoet,” sê hulle en gaan in.

Die geselskamer is gepak en lawaaiërig. Almal eet die kos wat opgestuur is. Net Hermien staan eenkant by die deur vir hulle en wag. Daar is ’n ongemaklike stilte. Toe, sonder dat hulle na mekaar kyk, sê hulle dankie en storm weg om borde te gaan kry.

Van daardie dag af is Hermien la Grange hul vriendin. Daar is dinge wat mense nie kan deel sonder dat hulle daarna van mekaar hou nie, en om ’n bergtrol van vier meter uit te slaan, is een daarvan.

CHAPTER ELEVEN



QUIDDITCH

As they entered November, the weather turned very cold. The mountains around the school became icy gray and the lake like chilled steel. Every morning the ground was covered in frost. Hagrid could be seen from the upstairs windows defrosting broomsticks on the Quidditch field, bundled up in a long moleskin overcoat, rabbit fur gloves, and enormous beaverskin boots.

The Quidditch season had begun. On Saturday, Harry would be playing in his first match after weeks of training: Gryffindor versus Slytherin. If Gryffindor won, they would move up into second place in the House Championship.

Hardly anyone had seen Harry play because Wood had decided that, as their secret weapon, Harry should be kept, well, secret. But the news that he was playing Seeker had leaked out somehow, and Harry didn't know which was worse — people telling him he'd be brilliant or people telling him they'd be running around underneath him holding a mattress.

It was really lucky that Harry now had Hermione as a friend. He didn't know how he'd have gotten through all his homework without her, what with all the last-minute Quidditch practice Wood was making them do. She had also lent him *Quidditch Through the Ages*, which turned out to be a very interesting read.

Harry learned that there were seven hundred ways of committing a Quidditch foul and that all of them had happened during a World Cup match in 1473; that Seekers were usually the smallest and fastest

players, and that most serious Quidditch accidents seemed to happen to them; that although people rarely died playing Quidditch, referees had been known to vanish and turn up months later in the Sahara Desert.

Hermione had become a bit more relaxed about breaking rules since Harry and Ron had saved her from the mountain troll, and she was much nicer for it. The day before Harry's first Quidditch match the three of them were out in the freezing courtyard during break, and she had conjured them up a bright blue fire that could be carried around in a jam jar. They were standing with their backs to it, getting warm, when Snape crossed the yard. Harry noticed at once that Snape was limping. Harry, Ron, and Hermione moved closer together to block the fire from view; they were sure it wouldn't be allowed. Unfortunately, something about their guilty faces caught Snape's eye. He limped over. He hadn't seen the fire, but he seemed to be looking for a reason to tell them off anyway.

"What's that you've got there, Potter?"

It was *Quidditch Through the Ages*. Harry showed him.

"Library books are not to be taken outside the school," said Snape.

"Give it to me. Five points from Gryffindor."

"He's just made that rule up," Harry muttered angrily as Snape limped away. "Wonder what's wrong with his leg?"

"Dunno, but I hope it's really hurting him," said Ron bitterly.

The Gryffindor common room was very noisy that evening. Harry, Ron, and Hermione sat together next to a window. Hermione was checking Harry and Ron's Charms homework for them. She would never let them copy ("How will you learn?"), but by asking her to

read it through, they got the right answers anyway.

Harry felt restless. He wanted *Quidditch Through the Ages* back, to take his mind off his nerves about tomorrow. Why should he be afraid of Snape? Getting up, he told Ron and Hermione he was going to ask Snape if he could have it.

“Better you than me,” they said together, but Harry had an idea that Snape wouldn’t refuse if there were other teachers listening.

He made his way down to the staffroom and knocked. There was no answer. He knocked again. Nothing.

Perhaps Snape had left the book in there? It was worth a try. He pushed the door ajar and peered inside — and a horrible scene met his eyes.

Snape and Filch were inside, alone. Snape was holding his robes above his knees. One of his legs was bloody and mangled. Filch was handing Snape bandages.

“Blasted thing,” Snape was saying. “How are you supposed to keep your eyes on all three heads at once?”

Harry tried to shut the door quietly, but —

“POTTER!”

Snape’s face was twisted with fury as he dropped his robes quickly to hide his leg. Harry gulped.

“I just wondered if I could have my book back.”

“GET OUT! *OUT!*”

Harry left, before Snape could take any more points from Gryffindor. He sprinted back upstairs.

“Did you get it?” Ron asked as Harry joined them. “What’s the matter?”

In a low whisper, Harry told them what he'd seen.

"You know what this means?" he finished breathlessly. "He tried to get past that three-headed dog at Halloween! That's where he was going when we saw him — he's after whatever it's guarding! And I'd bet my broomstick *he* let that troll in, to make a diversion!"

Hermione's eyes were wide.

"No — he wouldn't," she said. "I know he's not very nice, but he wouldn't try and steal something Dumbledore was keeping safe."

"Honestly, Hermione, you think all teachers are saints or something," snapped Ron. "I'm with Harry. I wouldn't put anything past Snape. But what's he after? What's that dog guarding?"

Harry went to bed with his head buzzing with the same question. Neville was snoring loudly, but Harry couldn't sleep. He tried to empty his mind — he needed to sleep, he had to, he had his first Quidditch match in a few hours — but the expression on Snape's face when Harry had seen his leg wasn't easy to forget.

The next morning dawned very bright and cold. The Great Hall was full of the delicious smell of fried sausages and the cheerful chatter of everyone looking forward to a good Quidditch match.

"You've got to eat some breakfast."

"I don't want anything."

"Just a bit of toast," wheedled Hermione.

"I'm not hungry."

Harry felt terrible. In an hour's time he'd be walking onto the field.

"Harry, you need your strength," said Seamus Finnigan. "Seekers are always the ones who get clobbered by the other team."

“Thanks, Seamus,” said Harry, watching Seamus pile ketchup on his sausages.

By eleven o’clock the whole school seemed to be out in the stands around the Quidditch pitch. Many students had binoculars. The seats might be raised high in the air, but it was still difficult to see what was going on sometimes.

Ron and Hermione joined Neville, Seamus, and Dean the West Ham fan up in the top row. As a surprise for Harry, they had painted a large banner on one of the sheets Scabbers had ruined. It said *Potter for President*, and Dean, who was good at drawing, had done a large Gryffindor lion underneath. Then Hermione had performed a tricky little charm so that the paint flashed different colors.

Meanwhile, in the locker room, Harry and the rest of the team were changing into their scarlet Quidditch robes (Slytherin would be playing in green).

Wood cleared his throat for silence.

“Okay, men,” he said.

“And women,” said Chaser Angelina Johnson.

“And women,” Wood agreed. “This is it.”

“The big one,” said Fred Weasley.

“The one we’ve all been waiting for,” said George.

“We know Oliver’s speech by heart,” Fred told Harry, “we were on the team last year.”

“Shut up, you two,” said Wood. “This is the best team Gryffindor’s had in years. We’re going to win. I know it.”

He glared at them all as if to say, “Or else.”

“Right. It’s time. Good luck, all of you.”

Harry followed Fred and George out of the locker room and, hoping his knees weren't going to give way, walked onto the field to loud cheers.

Madam Hooch was refereeing. She stood in the middle of the field waiting for the two teams, her broom in her hand.

“Now, I want a nice fair game, all of you,” she said, once they were all gathered around her. Harry noticed that she seemed to be speaking particularly to the Slytherin Captain, Marcus Flint, a fifth year. Harry thought Flint looked as if he had some troll blood in him. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the fluttering banner high above, flashing *Potter for President* over the crowd. His heart skipped. He felt braver.

“Mount your brooms, please.”

Harry clambered onto his Nimbus Two Thousand.

Madam Hooch gave a loud blast on her silver whistle.

Fifteen brooms rose up, high, high into the air. They were off.

“And the Quaffle is taken immediately by Angelina Johnson of Gryffindor — what an excellent Chaser that girl is, and rather attractive, too —”

“JORDAN!”

“Sorry, Professor.”

The Weasley twins' friend, Lee Jordan, was doing the commentary for the match, closely watched by Professor McGonagall.

“And she's really belting along up there, a neat pass to Alicia Spinnet, a good find of Oliver Wood's, last year only a reserve — back to Johnson and — no, the Slytherins have taken the Quaffle, Slytherin Captain Marcus Flint gains the Quaffle and off he goes —

Flint flying like an eagle up there — he’s going to sc— no, stopped by an excellent move by Gryffindor Keeper Wood and the Gryffindors take the Quaffle — that’s Chaser Katie Bell of Gryffindor there, nice dive around Flint, off up the field and — OUCH — that must have hurt, hit in the back of the head by a Bludger — Quaffle taken by the Slytherins — that’s Adrian Pucey speeding off toward the goalposts, but he’s blocked by a second Bludger — sent his way by Fred or George Weasley, can’t tell which — nice play by the Gryffindor Beater, anyway, and Johnson back in possession of the Quaffle, a clear field ahead and off she goes — she’s really flying — dodges a speeding Bludger — the goalposts are ahead — come on, now, Angelina — Keeper Bletchley dives — misses — GRYFFINDOR SCORE!”

Gryffindor cheers filled the cold air, with howls and moans from the Slytherins.

“Budge up there, move along.”

“Hagrid!”

Ron and Hermione squeezed together to give Hagrid enough space to join them.

“Bin watchin’ from me hut,” said Hagrid, patting a large pair of binoculars around his neck, “But it isn’t the same as bein’ in the crowd. No sign of the Snitch yet, eh?”

“Nope,” said Ron. “Harry hasn’t had much to do yet.”

“Kept outta trouble, though, that’s somethin’,” said Hagrid, raising his binoculars and peering skyward at the speck that was Harry.

Way up above them, Harry was gliding over the game, squinting about for some sign of the Snitch. This was part of his and Wood’s

game plan.

“Keep out of the way until you catch sight of the Snitch,” Wood had said. “We don’t want you attacked before you have to be.”

When Angelina had scored, Harry had done a couple of loop-the-loops to let off his feelings. Now he was back to staring around for the Snitch. Once he caught sight of a flash of gold, but it was just a reflection from one of the Weasleys’ wristwatches, and once a Bludger decided to come pelting his way, more like a cannonball than anything, but Harry dodged it and Fred Weasley came chasing after it.

“All right there, Harry?” he had time to yell, as he beat the Bludger furiously toward Marcus Flint.

“Slytherin in possession,” Lee Jordan was saying, “Chaser Pucey ducks two Bludgers, two Weasleys, and Chaser Bell, and speeds toward the — wait a moment — was that the Snitch?”

A murmur ran through the crowd as Adrian Pucey dropped the Quaffle, too busy looking over his shoulder at the flash of gold that had passed his left ear.

Harry saw it. In a great rush of excitement he dived downward after the streak of gold. Slytherin Seeker Terence Higgs had seen it, too. Neck and neck they hurtled toward the Snitch — all the Chasers seemed to have forgotten what they were supposed to be doing as they hung in midair to watch.

Harry was faster than Higgs — he could see the little round ball, wings fluttering, darting up ahead — he put on an extra spurt of speed —

WHAM! A roar of rage echoed from the Gryffindors below —

Marcus Flint had blocked Harry on purpose, and Harry's broom spun off course, Harry holding on for dear life.

"Foul!" screamed the Gryffindors.

Madam Hooch spoke angrily to Flint and then ordered a free shot at the goalposts for Gryffindor. But in all the confusion, of course, the Golden Snitch had disappeared from sight again.

Down in the stands, Dean Thomas was yelling, "Send him off, ref! Red card!"

"What are you talking about, Dean?" said Ron.

"Red card!" said Dean furiously. "In soccer you get shown the red card and you're out of the game!"

"But this isn't soccer, Dean," Ron reminded him.

Hagrid, however, was on Dean's side.

"They oughta change the rules. Flint coulda knocked Harry outta the air."

Lee Jordan was finding it difficult not to take sides.

"So — after that obvious and disgusting bit of cheating —"

"Jordan!" growled Professor McGonagall.

"I mean, after that open and revolting foul —"

"Jordan, I'm warning you —"

"All right, all right. Flint nearly kills the Gryffindor Seeker, which could happen to anyone, I'm sure, so a penalty to Gryffindor, taken by Spinnet, who puts it away, no trouble, and we continue play, Gryffindor still in possession."

It was as Harry dodged another Bludger, which went spinning dangerously past his head, that it happened. His broom gave a sudden, frightening lurch. For a split second, he thought he was going

to fall. He gripped the broom tightly with both his hands and knees. He'd never felt anything like that.

It happened again. It was as though the broom was trying to buck him off. But Nimbus Two Thousands did not suddenly decide to buck their riders off. Harry tried to turn back toward the Gryffindor goalposts — he had half a mind to ask Wood to call time-out — and then he realized that his broom was completely out of his control. He couldn't turn it. He couldn't direct it at all. It was zigzagging through the air, and every now and then making violent swishing movements that almost unseated him.

Lee was still commentating.

“Slytherin in possession — Flint with the Quaffle — passes Spinnet — passes Bell — hit hard in the face by a Bludger, hope it broke his nose — only joking, Professor — Slytherins score — oh no . . .”

The Slytherins were cheering. No one seemed to have noticed that Harry's broom was behaving strangely. It was carrying him slowly higher, away from the game, jerking and twitching as it went.

“Dunno what Harry thinks he's doing,” Hagrid mumbled. He stared through his binoculars. “If I didn' know better, I'd say he'd lost control of his broom . . . but he can't have. . . .”

Suddenly, people were pointing up at Harry all over the stands. His broom had started to roll over and over, with him only just managing to hold on. Then the whole crowd gasped. Harry's broom had given a wild jerk and Harry swung off it. He was now dangling from it, holding on with only one hand.

“Did something happen to it when Flint blocked him?” Seamus

whispered.

“Can’t have,” Hagrid said, his voice shaking. “Can’t nothing interfere with a broomstick except powerful Dark magic — no kid could do that to a Nimbus Two Thousand.”

At these words, Hermione seized Hagrid’s binoculars, but instead of looking up at Harry, she started looking frantically at the crowd.

“What are you doing?” moaned Ron, gray-faced.

“I knew it,” Hermione gasped, “Snape — look.”

Ron grabbed the binoculars. Snape was in the middle of the stands opposite them. He had his eyes fixed on Harry and was muttering nonstop under his breath.

“He’s doing something — jinxing the broom,” said Hermione.

“What should we do?”

“Leave it to me.”

Before Ron could say another word, Hermione had disappeared. Ron turned the binoculars back on Harry. His broom was vibrating so hard, it was almost impossible for him to hang on much longer. The whole crowd was on its feet, watching, terrified, as the Weasleys flew up to try and pull Harry safely onto one of their brooms, but it was no good — every time they got near him, the broom would jump higher still. They dropped lower and circled beneath him, obviously hoping to catch him if he fell. Marcus Flint seized the Quaffle and scored five times without anyone noticing.

“Come on, Hermione,” Ron muttered desperately.

Hermione had fought her way across to the stand where Snape stood, and was now racing along the row behind him; she didn’t even stop to say sorry as she knocked Professor Quirrell headfirst into the

row in front. Reaching Snape, she crouched down, pulled out her wand, and whispered a few, well-chosen words. Bright blue flames shot from her wand onto the hem of Snape's robes.

It took perhaps thirty seconds for Snape to realize that he was on fire. A sudden yelp told her she had done her job. Scooping the fire off him into a little jar in her pocket, she scrambled back along the row — Snape would never know what had happened.

It was enough. Up in the air, Harry was suddenly able to clamber back on to his broom.

"Neville, you can look!" Ron said. Neville had been sobbing into Hagrid's jacket for the last five minutes.

Harry was speeding toward the ground when the crowd saw him clap his hand to his mouth as though he was about to be sick — he hit the field on all fours — coughed — and something gold fell into his hand.

"I've got the Snitch!" he shouted, waving it above his head, and the game ended in complete confusion.

"He didn't *catch* it, he nearly *swallowed* it," Flint was still howling twenty minutes later, but it made no difference — Harry hadn't broken any rules and Lee Jordan was still happily shouting the results — Gryffindor had won by one hundred and seventy points to sixty. Harry heard none of this, though. He was being made a cup of strong tea back in Hagrid's hut, with Ron and Hermione.

"It was Snape," Ron was explaining, "Hermione and I saw him. He was cursing your broomstick, muttering, he wouldn't take his eyes off you."

"Rubbish," said Hagrid, who hadn't heard a word of what had

gone on next to him in the stands. “Why would Snape do somethin’ like that?”

Harry, Ron, and Hermione looked at one another, wondering what to tell him. Harry decided on the truth.

“I found out something about him,” he told Hagrid. “He tried to get past that three-headed dog on Halloween. It bit him. We think he was trying to steal whatever it’s guarding.”

Hagrid dropped the teapot.

“How do you know about Fluffy?” he said.

“*Fluffy?*”

“Yeah — he’s mine — bought him off a Greek chappie I met in the pub las’ year — I lent him to Dumbledore to guard the —”

“Yes?” said Harry eagerly.

“Now, don’t ask me anymore,” said Hagrid gruffly. “That’s top secret, that is.”

“But Snape’s trying to *steal* it.”

“Rubbish,” said Hagrid again. “Snape’s a Hogwarts teacher, he’d do nothin’ of the sort.”

“So why did he just try and kill Harry?” cried Hermione.

The afternoon’s events certainly seemed to have changed her mind about Snape.

“I know a jinx when I see one, Hagrid, I’ve read all about them! You’ve got to keep eye contact, and Snape wasn’t blinking at all, I saw him!”

“I’m tellin’ yeh, yer wrong!” said Hagrid hotly. “I don’ know why Harry’s broom acted like that, but Snape wouldn’ try an’ kill a student! Now, listen to me, all three of yeh — yer meddlin’ in things

that don' concern yeh. It's dangerous. You forget that dog, an' you forget what it's guardin', that's between Professor Dumbledore an' Nicolas Flamel —”

“Aha!” said Harry, “so there's someone called Nicolas Flamel involved, is there?”

Hagrid looked furious with himself.

Kwiddiek

Hoe nader November kom, hoe kouer word dit. Die berge om die skool lyk ysig grys en die meer soos koue staal. Soggens is die grond bedek met ryp. Hagrid kan van die boonste vensters af gesien word terwyl hy die besemstokke op die Kwiddiek-veld ontvries. Hy is toegewikkel in 'n lang molveloorjas, handskoene van haasvel en tamaai groot bewervelstewels.

Die Kwiddiek-seisoen het begin. Daardie komende Saterdag gaan Harry, na weke se oefen, sy eerste wedstryd speel: Griffindor teen Slibberin. As Griffindor wen, beklee hulle die tweede posisie in die huiskampioenskap.

Nog feitlik niemand het al vir Harry sien speel nie, want Wood het besluit dat Harry, as hul geheime wapen, wel . . . geheim gehou moet word. Die nuus dat Harry Soeker speel, het egter uitgelek en Harry weet nie wat erger is nie – mense wat vir hom vertel hoe briljant hy gaan wees, of mense wat vertel hoe hulle met 'n matras onder hom gaan rondhardloop.

Dis 'n geluk dat Harry nou vir Hermien as vriendin het. Hy weet nie hoe hy sonder haar deur al sy huiswerk sou kom nie, nie met al die Kwiddiek-oefeninge wat Wood op die laaste minuut vir hulle laat doen nie. Sy leen ook vir hom *Kwiddiek deur die Eeue*, wat 'n baie interessante boek is.

Harry leer dat daar sewehonderd maniere is om vuil te speel en dat almal tydens 'n Kwiddiek-wêreldbekerwedstryd in 1473 gebruik is; dat Soekers gewoonlik die kleinste en vinnigste spelers is en dat die meeste ernstige ongelukke met hulle gebeur; dat hoewel mense selde gedood word tydens Kwiddiek, skeidsregters al verdwyn het en eers maande later in die Sahara-woestyn gekry is.

Sedert Harry en Ron haar van die bergtrol gered het, is Hermien meer ontspanne oor die oortreding van reëls en dus baie gawer. Die dag voor Harry se eerste Kwiddiek-wedstryd is die drie pouse buite in die snerpende koue binnehof. Hermien het 'n helderblou vuur getoor, een wat 'n mens in 'n konfytfles kan rondra. Hulle staan met hul rûe daarna om warm te word toe Snerp oor die binnehof stap. Harry merk dadelik dat Snerp kruppel loop. Harry, Ron en Hermien beweeg nader aan mekaar

om te keer dat hy die vuur sien; hulle is seker dit word nie toegelaat nie. Ongelukkig is daar iets aan hul skuldige gesigte wat Snerp se aandag trek. Hy hink nader. Hy het nie die vuur gesien nie; hy soek sommer 'n rede om met hulle te raas.

“Wat het jy daar, Potter?”

Dit is *Kwiddiek deur die Eeue* en Harry wys hom die boek.

“Biblioteekboeke mag nie uit die skoolgebou verwyder word nie,” sê Snerp. “Gee dit hier. Vyf punte van Griffindor af.”

“Hy’t daardie reël nou net opgemaak,” brom Harry ergerlik toe Snerp weghobbel. “Wonder wat makeer sy been?”

“Weet nie, maar ek hoop dis goed seer,” sê Ron vies.

Daardie aand is die Griffindor-geselskamer besonder lawaaierig. Harry, Ron en Hermien sit saam voor 'n venster. Hermien gaan Harry en Ron se Towerspreuk-huiswerk na. Sy laat hulle nooit toe om net af te skryf nie (“Hoe sal julle ooit leer?”), maar deur haar te vra om hul huiswerk te lees, het hulle op die ou end tog al die antwoorde reg.

Harry voel rusteloos. Hy wil *Kwiddiek deur die Eeue* terughê sodat hy iets het om sy aandag van die volgende dag se wedstryd af te trek. Hoekom sal hy vir Snerp bang wees? Hy staan op en sê vir Ron en Hermien dat hy sy boek by Snerp gaan vra.

“Liewer jy as ek,” sê hulle in 'n koor, maar Harry reken dat Snerp nie sal weier as daar ander onderwysers is wat kan hoor nie.

Hy stap na die personeelkamer en klop. Daar is geen antwoord nie. Hy klop weer. Niks.

Dalk het Snerp die boek daar laat lê? Dis die moeite werd om te kyk. Hy stoot die deur effens oop en loer in – en 'n aaklige gesig staar hom in die oë.

Snerp en Fillis is daar binne, alleen. Snerp het sy kleed tot bo sy knieë gelig. Sy een been is bebloed en verskeur. Fillis gee vir Snerp verbande aan.

“Verbrande ding,” sê Snerp. “Hoe moet 'n mens al drie daardie koppe gelyk dophou?”

Harry probeer die deur saggies toestoot, maar –

“POTTER!”

Snerp se gesig is vertrek van woede. Hy laat sak sy kleed vinnig om sy been weg te steek. Harry sluk swaar.

“Ek wil net weet of ek my boek kan terugkry.”

“GAAN UIT! UIT!”

Harry gee pad voor Snerp weer van Griffindor punte kan aftrek. Hy nael terug boontoe.

“Het jy dit gekry?” vra Ron toe Harry by hulle aansluit. “Wat makeer?”

In 'n gedempte stem vertel Harry vir hulle wat hy gesien het.

“Weet julle wat dit beteken?” vra hy ademloos. “Hy’t op Allerheiligendaand verby daardie driekoppige hond probeer kom! Dis waarheen hy op pad was toe ons hom gesien het – hy’s agter dit aan wat daar opgepas word! Ek wed my besem hy het daardie trol laat inkom om almal se aandag af te trek!”

Hermien se oë is wyd gerek.

“Nee – hy sal nie,” sê sy. “Ek weet hy’s nie juis gaaf nie, maar hy sal nie iets probeer steel wat Dompeldorius in veilige bewaring het nie.”

“Regtig, Hermien, jy dink ook alle onderwysers is heilig of iets,” jak Ron haar af. “Ek stem saam met Harry. Snerp sal enigiets doen. Maar waarna soek hy? Wat moet daardie hond oppas?”

Daardie aand toe Harry gaan slaap, maal hierdie selfde vrae deur sy brein. Neville snork luidkeels, maar Harry kan nie slaap nie. Hy probeer sy kop leegmaak – hy het slaap nodig, hy moet slaap, binne ’n paar uur gaan hy sy eerste Kwiddiek-wedstryd speel – maar die uitdrukking op Snerp se gesig toe Harry sy been gesien het, kan hy net nie vergeet nie.

Die volgende oggend is kraakhelder en koud. Die Groot Saal is gevul met die heerlike geur van gebraaide wors en die vrolike geklets van almal wat na die Kwiddiek-wedstryd uitsien.

“Jy moet *iets* eet.”

“Ek wil niks hê nie.”

“Net ’n stukkie roosterbrood,” probeer Hermien.

“Ek is nie honger nie.”

Harry voel verskriklik. Oor ’n uur moet hy op die veld draf.

“Harry, jy het energie nodig,” sê Septimus Floris. “Dis altyd die Soekers wat geboelie en seergemaak word.”

“Dankie, Septimus,” sê Harry en kyk hoe Septimus tamatiesous oor sy wors gooi.

Teen elfuur lyk dit of die hele skool op die pawiljoen om die Kwiddiek-veld is. Heelwat van die studente het verkykers. Die sitplekke is nou wel hoog in die lug, maar dit is nog steeds soms moeilik om te sien wat gebeur.

Ron en Hermien sluit aan by Neville, Septimus en Dean, die West Ham-ondersteuner, en gaan sit op die heel boonste ry sitplekke. As ’n verrassing vir Harry het hulle ’n groot banier geverf op een van die lakens wat Skille verniel het. Daarop staan *Potter vir President* en Dean, wat kunstig is, het ’n groot Griffindor-leeu onderaan geteken. Toe het Hermien ’n towerspreuk uitgespreek sodat die verf in verskillende kleure flikker en flits.

Intussen, in die kleedkamers, is Harry en die res van die span besig om hul skarlakenrooi Kwiddiek-klere aan te trek (Slibberin speel in groen).

Wood maak sy keel skoon en vra vir stilte.

“Goed, manne,” sê hy.

“En vroue,” sê die Jaer, Angelina Johnson.

“En vroue,” stem Wood saam. “Vandag is die dag.”

“Die groot dag,” sê Fred Weasley.

“Die een waarop ons almal gewag het,” sê George.

“Ons ken Oliver se toespraak al uit ons koppe,” vertel Fred vir Harry, “ons was laas jaar ook in die span.”

“Hou julle snaters, julle twee,” sê Wood. “Dit is die beste span wat Griffindor in jare gehad het. Ons gaan wen. Ek weet dit.”

Hy gluur na hulle asof hy wil sê, Of anders. “Goed. Dis tyd,” gaan hy voort. “Voorspoed vir julle almal.”

Harry volg Fred en George uit die kleedkamer. Onder luide toejuiging loop hy op die veld. Hy kan net hoop dat sy knieë nie onder hom gaan meegee nie.

Madame Hooch is die skeidsregter. Sy staan besem in die hand in die middel van die veld en wag op die twee spanne.

“Nouja, ek verwag ’n regverdige wedstryd,” sê sy toe almal om haar saamdrom. Harry merk dat sy veral met die kaptein van die Slibberins praat, Marcus Flint, ’n vyfdejaar. Vir Harry lyk dit of Flint trolbloed kan hê. Uit die hoek van sy oog sien hy die banier daar hoog in die lug wat die woorde *Potter vir President* oor die skare laat wapper. Sy hart gee ’n skop. Hy voel sommer dapperder.

“Bestyg julle besems.”

Harry klim op sy Nimbus Tweeduisend.

Madame Hooch blaas hard op haar silwer fluitjie.

Vyftien besems styg op, hoog, hoog, die lug in. Die wedstryd het begin.

“En die Swelger is onmiddellik onderskep deur Angelina Johnson van Griffindor – wat ’n uitstekende Jaer is sy nie en nogal aantreklik ook –”

“JORDAAN!”

“Jammer, professor.”

Die Weasley-tweeling se vriend Lee Jordaan is verantwoordelik vir die kommentaar by die wedstryd en professor McGonagall hou hom met ’n arendsoog dop.

“En sy’s regtig mooi op pad daar bo, ’n netjiese aangee na Alicia Spinnet, werklik ’n vonds, ’n mens moet Oliver Wood gelukwens, verlede jaar slegs ’n reserwe – terug aan Johnson en – nee, Slibberin het die Swelger afgeneem, dis die Slibberin-kaptein, Marcus Flint, en daar gaan hy – Flint vlieg soos ’n arend daar bo – hy mik vir die doel – nee, gestuit – ’n uitstekende beweging uitgevoer deur die Griffindor-Wagter, Wood, en nou het Griffindor die Swelger – dis Jaer Katie Bell van Griffindor, netjiese duikslag om Flint, op teen die kant van die veld – SJOE – dit moet seer wees, ’n Moker teen die agterkant van die kop – die Swelger nou in besit

van Slibberin – dis Adriaan Pienaar op pad doelpale toe, maar hy word geblok deur 'n tweede Moker – weggestuur deur Fred of George Weasley, kan nie sê wie dit was nie – mooi spel deur die Griffindor-Breker en Johnson weer in besit van die Swelger, 'n skoon veld voor haar en daar gaan sy – sy vlieg behoorlik – ontwyk 'n jagende Moker – die doelpale is voor haar – komaan, Angelina – Wagter Bletchley duik – mis – 'N DOEL VIR GRIFFINDOR!”

'n Gejuig van Griffindor vul die koue lug, gemeng met krete en sugte uit Slibberin se geledere.

“Skuif op, julle twee.”

“Hagrid!”

Ron en Hermien druk styf teen mekaar sodat Hagrid by hulle kan sit.

“Het van my hut af gekyk,” sê Hagrid, en tik teen 'n groot verkyker wat om sy nek hang. “Maar dis nie dieselfde as om hier tussen die toeskouers te wees nie. Nog geen teken van die Snip nie?”

“Nee,” sê Ron. “Harry het nog nie juis iets gehad om te doen nie.”

“Bly uit die moeilikheid, dis ook al iets,” sê Hagrid en lig sy verkyker en staar na die kolletjie wat Harry is.

Daar ver bo hulle gly Harry oor die spelers en soek na die Goue Snip. Dit is deel van sy en Wood se strategie.

“Bly uit die pad tot jy die Snip sien,” het Wood gesê. “Ons wil nie hê hulle moet jou aanval voor dit nodig is nie.”

Angelina se doel veroorsaak dat Harry 'n paar keer bollemakiesie slaan, net om 'n bietjie stoom af te blaas. Nou is hy terug op sy pos en op soek na die Snip. Hy vang 'n slag 'n glimp van iets goude, maar dis net die weerkaatsing van een van die Weasleys se polshorlosies. Een keer besluit 'n Moker om hom aan te val, meer soos 'n kanonkoeël as iets anders, maar Harry ontwyk dit en Fred Weasley sit dit agterna.

“Alles reg daar, Harry?” roep hy vinnig in die verbygaan, terwyl hy die Moker woes in Marcus Flint se rigting slaan.

“Slibberin in besit,” sê Lee Jordaan, “Jaer Pienaar ontduik twee Mokers, twee Weasleys en Jaer Bell, en sit af in die rigting van – wag 'n bietjie – was dit die Snip?”

'n Fluistering rimpel deur die skare toe Adriaan Pienaar die Swelger laat val, te besig om oor sy skouer te kyk na die goue blitsstraal wat verby sy linkeroor skiet.

Harry het dit gesien. In 'n gloed van opwindung duik hy af op die goue streep. Slibberin se Soeker, Terence Higgs, het dit ook gesien. Kop aan kop pyl hulle af op die Snip – dis of al die Jaers vergeet het wat hulle veronderstel is om te doen, hulle hang in die lug om te kyk.

Harry is vinniger as Higgs – hy sien hoe die klein ronde balletjie met fladderende vlerkies voor hom uitskiet – hy tel ekstra spoed op –

KABAM! 'n Gebrul van woede weerklink uit die geledere van die

Griffindors op die pawiljoen – Marcus Flint het Harry met opset geblok en Harry se besem tol buite beheer, sodat hy om lewe en dood aan die steel moet klou.

“Vuilspel!” skreeu die Griffindors.

Madame Hooch praat hard met Flint en gee ’n vrygooi na die doelpale vir Griffindor. Te midde van die verwarring, het die Goue Snip natuurlik spoorloos verdwyn.

Van die pawiljoen af gil Dean Thomas, “Stuur hom af! Stuur hom af! Rooi kaart!”

“Dis nie sokker nie, Dean,” herinner Ron hom. “Jy kan nie mense afstuur as jy Kwiddiek speel nie”

Maar Hagrid is aan Dean se kant.

“Hulle behoort die reëls te verander. Flint kon Harry uit die lug uit geslaan het.”

Dis duidelik moeilik vir Lee Jordaan om onpartydig te bly.

“Dus – na hierdie openlike en vieslike stukkie vuilspel –”

“Jordaan!” grom professor McGonagall.

“Ek bedoel, na hierdie onverbloemde en onderduimse vuil –”

“Jordaan, ek waarsku jou –”

“Goed, goed. Flint het so pas amper die Griffindor-Soeker vermoor, iets wat met absoluut enigiemand kan gebeur, dit verseker ek julle, daar is dus ’n vrygooi aan Griffindor, waargeneem deur Spinnet, wat dit sonder enige probleme wegsit en ons gaan voort met die spel, Griffindor nog steeds in besit.”

Dis toe Harry nog ’n Moker ontwyk, een wat gevaarlik na aan sy kop verbyvlieg, dat dit gebeur. Sy besem gee ’n skielike, angswekkende ruk. Vir ’n breukdeel van ’n sekonde voel dit of hy gaan val. Hy pak die besemstok met albei hande en knyp dit vas tussen sy knieë. So iets het nog nooit tevore gebeur nie.

Dit gebeur weer. Dis of die besem hom wil afgooi. In die reël gooi Nimbus Tweeduisend- besemstokke nie sommer hul ruiters af nie. Harry probeer terugdraai na die Griffindor-doelpale; hy wil amper vir Wood vra om die wedstryd vir ’n rukkiet te stop – maar hy besef gou dat sy besem heeltemal buite beheer is. Dit wil nie draai nie. Hy kan dit glad nie stuur nie. Dit sigsag deur die lug en elke nou en dan swiep dit woes van kant tot kant en dreig om hom af te gooi.

Lee lewer nog steeds kommentaar.

“Slibberin in besit – Flint met die Swelger – verby Spinnet – verby Bell – hard in die gesig getref deur ’n Moker, hoop dit breek sy neus – net ’n grappie, professor – ’n doel vir Slibberin – o nee . . .”

Die Slibberins juig. Dis of niemand oplet dat daar fout met Harry se besem is nie. Dit voer hom stadig al hoër en hoër, weg van die wedstryd: dit ruk en pluk so ver as dit gaan.

“Weet nie wat met Harry aangaan nie,” mompel Hagrid. Hy staar deur sy verkyker. “As ek nie van beter geweet het nie, sou ek sê hy’t beheer oor daardie besem verloor . . . maar dit kan tog nie . . .”

Skielik wys almal op die pawiljoen na Harry. Sy besem tol om en om, so erg dat hy net-net daarin slaag om te bly sit. Toe snak die hele skare na asem. Harry se besem gee ’n wilde skop en Harry swaai af. Hy hang net aan een hand.

“Kon iets daarmee gebeur het toe Flint hom geblok het?” fluister Septimus.

“Kan nie wees nie,” sê Hagrid en sy stem bewe. “Niks kan met ’n besem verkeerd loop nie, net as daar kragtige Donker towerwerk is – ’n kind kan dit nie aan ’n Nimbus Tweeduisend doen nie.”

Toe sy hierdie woorde hoor, gryp Hermien Hagrid se verkyker, maar pleks dat sy na Harry kyk, bekyk sy die skare.

“Wat doen jy?” vra Ron. Hy is grys in die gesig.

“Ek het dit geweet,” hyg Hermien, “Snerp – kyk.”

Ron gryp die verkyker. Snerp staan in die middel van die pawiljoen regoor hulle. Sy blik is intens op Harry gerig en hy mompel die hele tyd onderlangs.

“Hy doen iets – hy toor die besem,” sê Hermien.

“Wat gaan ons maak?”

“Los dit vir my.”

Voor Ron nog ’n woord kan sê, het Hermien verdwyn. Ron rig die verkyker weer op Harry. Nou skud Harry se besem so woens, hy kan net eenvoudig nie veel langer bo bly nie. Die skare is op hul voete en kyk, verskrik, hoe die Weasley-tweeling nader vlieg en probeer om Harry op een van hul besems te laai, maar dit werk nie – elke keer dat hulle by hom kom, spring die besem net nog hoër. Hulle sak en sirkel onder hom, dis duidelik dat hulle gaan probeer om hom te vang as hy dalk val. Marcus Flint gryp die Swelger en kry vyf doele sonder dat iemand dit sien.

“Opskud, Hermien,” mompel Ron benoud.

Hermien moet ’n pad oor die pawiljoen oopveg na waar Snerp staan. Nou hardloop sy in die ry agter hom; sy vra nie eens om verskoning toe sy vir professor Quirrell uit die pad stamp sodat hy tussen die mense voor hom intuimel nie. Toe sy by professor Snerp kom, buk sy, haal haar towerstaf uit en fluister ’n paar goedgekose woorde. Onmiddellik skiet helderblou vlamme van haar towerstaf tot op die soom van Snerp se kleed.

Dit neem sowat dertig sekondes voordat Snerp besef dat hy brand. ’n Skielike kreet laat Hermien besef dat haar werk voltooi is. Sy vee die vlamme in ’n flessie wat sy in haar sak hou en skarrel terug na haar plek – Snerp sal nooit weet wat sy gedoen het nie.

Dit is genoeg. Bo in die lug kan Harry skielik weer op sy besem klouter.

“Neville, jy kan maar kyk!” sê Ron. Vir die laaste vyf minute het Neville teen Hagrid se baadjie sit en huil.

Harry is besig om grond toe te vlieg toe die skare sien hoe hy sy hand oor sy mond klap soos een wat wil opgooi. Hy val hande-viervoet op die veld – hoes – en iets goude rol in sy hand.

“Ek het die Snip!” skree hy en waai dit bo sy kop. Die wedstryd eindig in volslae chaos.

“Hy’t dit nie *gevang* nie, hy’t dit amper *ingesluk*,” kerm Flint twintig minute later, maar dit maak geen verskil nie – Harry het geen reëls oortree nie en Lee Jordaan skreeu nog steeds die eindtelling uit – Griffindor het gewen met eenhonderd-en-sewentig punte teen sestig. Harry hoor egter niks hiervan nie. Hy is besig om saam met Ron en Hermien ’n koppie sterk tee in Hagrid se hut te drink.

“Dit was Snerp,” verduidelik Ron, “ek en Hermien het hom gesien. Hy’t ’n vloek op jou besem gesit, hy’t gemompel en alles, sy oë was die hele tyd op jou.”

“Twak,” sê Hagrid wat nie ’n woord gehoor het van wat langs hom op die pawiljoen gesê is nie. “Hoekom sal Snerp so iets wil doen?”

Harry, Ron en Hermien kyk na mekaar. Hulle wonder wat hulle vir hom moet vertel. Harry besluit op die waarheid.

“Ek het iets oor hom uitgevind,” sê hy vir Hagrid. “Op Allerheiligendaand het hy probeer om verby daardie driekoppige hond te kom. Dit het hom gebyt. Ons dink hy wou die ding wat daardie hond oppas, steel.

Hagrid laat sak die teepot.

“Hoe weet jy van Wollie?” vra hy.

“Wollie?”

“Ja – hy’s myne – het hom by ’n Griekse kêrel gekoop, iemand wat ek laas jaar in die kroeg ontmoet het – en hom vir Dompeldorius geleen om –”

“Ja?” sê Harry gretig.

“Moenie staan en uitvra nie,” sê Hagrid skor. “Dis hoogs geheim, dis wat.”

“Maar Snerp wou dit *steel*.”

“Bog,” sê Hagrid weer. “Snerp is een van Hogwarts se onderwysers. Hy sal nie so iets doen nie.”

“Hoekom het hy dan netnou vir Harry probeer vermoor?” roep Hermien uit.

Die gebeure van die middag het beslis haar idees oor Snerp verander.

“Ek ken ’n vloek as ek een sien, Hagrid, ek het alles daarvoor gelees! Jy moet oogkontak behou en Snerp het nie ’n ooglid geknip nie, ek het gesien!”

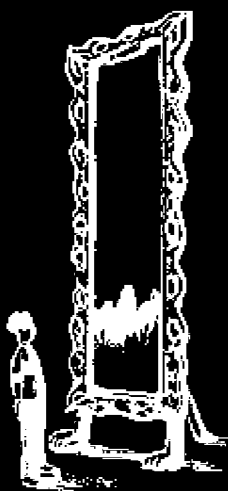
“Ek sê weer julle maak ’n fout!” sê Hagrid kwaai. “Ek weet nie hoekom Harry se besem so te kere gegaan het nie, maar Snerp sal nie probeer

om een van die studente dood te maak nie! Nou, luister hier, al drie van julle – julle karring met goed wat niks met julle uit te waai het nie. Dis gevaarlik. Sit daardie hond uit julle koppe en moenie weer vra wat dit daar doen nie; dis professor Dompeldorius se sake, syne en Nicolas Flamel s'n en –”

“Aha!” sê Harry, “so daar is iemand met die naam Nicolas Flamel hierby betrokke?”

Dit lyk of Hagrid homself kan skop.

CHAPTER TWELVE



THE MIRROR OF ERISED

Christmas was coming. One morning in mid-December, Hogwarts woke to find itself covered in several feet of snow. The lake froze solid and the Weasley twins were punished for bewitching several snowballs so that they followed Quirrell around, bouncing off the back of his turban. The few owls that managed to battle their way through the stormy sky to deliver mail had to be nursed back to health by Hagrid before they could fly off again.

No one could wait for the holidays to start. While the Gryffindor common room and the Great Hall had roaring fires, the drafty corridors had become icy and a bitter wind rattled the windows in the classrooms. Worst of all were Professor Snape's classes down in the dungeons, where their breath rose in a mist before them and they kept as close as possible to their hot cauldrons.

"I do feel so sorry," said Draco Malfoy, one Potions class, "for all those people who have to stay at Hogwarts for Christmas because they're not wanted at home."

He was looking over at Harry as he spoke. Crabbe and Goyle chuckled. Harry, who was measuring out powdered spine of lionfish, ignored them. Malfoy had been even more unpleasant than usual since the Quidditch match. Disgusted that the Slytherins had lost, he had tried to get everyone laughing at how a wide-mouthed tree frog would be replacing Harry as Seeker next. Then he'd realized that nobody found this funny, because they were all so impressed at the way Harry had managed to stay on his bucking broomstick. So

Malfoy, jealous and angry, had gone back to taunting Harry about having no proper family.

It was true that Harry wasn't going back to Privet Drive for Christmas. Professor McGonagall had come around the week before, making a list of students who would be staying for the holidays, and Harry had signed up at once. He didn't feel sorry for himself at all; this would probably be the best Christmas he'd ever had. Ron and his brothers were staying, too, because Mr. and Mrs. Weasley were going to Romania to visit Charlie.

When they left the dungeons at the end of Potions, they found a large fir tree blocking the corridor ahead. Two enormous feet sticking out at the bottom and a loud puffing sound told them that Hagrid was behind it.

"Hi, Hagrid, want any help?" Ron asked, sticking his head through the branches.

"Nah, I'm all right, thanks, Ron."

"Would you mind moving out of the way?" came Malfoy's cold drawl from behind them. "Are you trying to earn some extra money, Weasley? Hoping to be gamekeeper yourself when you leave Hogwarts, I suppose — that hut of Hagrid's must seem like a palace compared to what your family's used to."

Ron dived at Malfoy just as Snape came up the stairs.

"WEASLEY!"

Ron let go of the front of Malfoy's robes.

"He was provoked, Professor Snape," said Hagrid, sticking his huge hairy face out from behind the tree. "Malfoy was insultin' his family."

“Be that as it may, fighting is against Hogwarts rules, Hagrid,” said Snape silkily. “Five points from Gryffindor, Weasley, and be grateful it isn’t more. Move along, all of you.”

Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle pushed roughly past the tree, scattering needles everywhere and smirking.

“I’ll get him,” said Ron, grinding his teeth at Malfoy’s back, “one of these days, I’ll get him —”

“I hate them both,” said Harry, “Malfoy and Snape.”

“Come on, cheer up, it’s nearly Christmas,” said Hagrid. “Tell yeh what, come with me an’ see the Great Hall, looks a treat.”

So the three of them followed Hagrid and his tree off to the Great Hall, where Professor McGonagall and Professor Flitwick were busy with the Christmas decorations.

“Ah, Hagrid, the last tree — put it in the far corner, would you?”

The hall looked spectacular. Festoons of holly and mistletoe hung all around the walls, and no less than twelve towering Christmas trees stood around the room, some sparkling with tiny icicles, some glittering with hundreds of candles.

“How many days you got left until yer holidays?” Hagrid asked.

“Just one,” said Hermione. “And that reminds me — Harry, Ron, we’ve got half an hour before lunch, we should be in the library.”

“Oh yeah, you’re right,” said Ron, tearing his eyes away from Professor Flitwick, who had golden bubbles blossoming out of his wand and was trailing them over the branches of the new tree.

“The library?” said Hagrid, following them out of the hall. “Just before the holidays? Bit keen, aren’t yeh?”

“Oh, we’re not working,” Harry told him brightly. “Ever since you

mentioned Nicolas Flamel we've been trying to find out who he is."

"You *what*?" Hagrid looked shocked. "Listen here — I've told yeh — drop it. It's nothin' to you what that dog's guardin'."

"We just want to know who Nicolas Flamel is, that's all," said Hermione.

"Unless you'd like to tell us and save us the trouble?" Harry added. "We must've been through hundreds of books already and we can't find him anywhere — just give us a hint — I know I've read his name somewhere."

"I'm sayin' nothin'," said Hagrid flatly.

"Just have to find out for ourselves, then," said Ron, and they left Hagrid looking disgruntled and hurried off to the library.

They had indeed been searching books for Flamel's name ever since Hagrid had let it slip, because how else were they going to find out what Snape was trying to steal? The trouble was, it was very hard to know where to begin, not knowing what Flamel might have done to get himself into a book. He wasn't in *Great Wizards of the Twentieth Century*, or *Notable Magical Names of Our Time*; he was missing, too, from *Important Modern Magical Discoveries*, and *A Study of Recent Developments in Wizardry*. And then, of course, there was the sheer size of the library; tens of thousands of books; thousands of shelves; hundreds of narrow rows.

Hermione took out a list of subjects and titles she had decided to search while Ron strode off down a row of books and started pulling them off the shelves at random. Harry wandered over to the Restricted Section. He had been wondering for a while if Flamel wasn't somewhere in there. Unfortunately, you needed a specially

signed note from one of the teachers to look in any of the restricted books, and he knew he'd never get one. These were the books containing powerful Dark Magic never taught at Hogwarts, and only read by older students studying advanced Defense Against the Dark Arts.

"What are you looking for, boy?"

"Nothing," said Harry.

Madam Pince the librarian brandished a feather duster at him.

"You'd better get out, then. Go on — out!"

Wishing he'd been a bit quicker at thinking up some story, Harry left the library. He, Ron, and Hermione had already agreed they'd better not ask Madam Pince where they could find Flamel. They were sure she'd be able to tell them, but they couldn't risk Snape hearing what they were up to.

Harry waited outside in the corridor to see if the other two had found anything, but he wasn't very hopeful. They had been looking for two weeks, after all, but as they only had odd moments between lessons it wasn't surprising they'd found nothing. What they really needed was a nice long search without Madam Pince breathing down their necks.

Five minutes later, Ron and Hermione joined him, shaking their heads. They went off to lunch.

"You will keep looking while I'm away, won't you?" said Hermione. "And send me an owl if you find anything."

"And you could ask your parents if they know who Flamel is," said Ron. "It'd be safe to ask them."

"Very safe, as they're both dentists," said Hermione.

Once the holidays had started, Ron and Harry were having too good a time to think much about Flamel. They had the dormitory to themselves and the common room was far emptier than usual, so they were able to get the good armchairs by the fire. They sat by the hour eating anything they could spear on a toasting fork — bread, English muffins, marshmallows — and plotting ways of getting Malfoy expelled, which were fun to talk about even if they wouldn't work.

Ron also started teaching Harry wizard chess. This was exactly like Muggle chess except that the figures were alive, which made it a lot like directing troops in battle. Ron's set was very old and battered. Like everything else he owned, it had once belonged to someone else in his family — in this case, his grandfather. However, old chessmen weren't a drawback at all. Ron knew them so well he never had trouble getting them to do what he wanted.

Harry played with chessmen Seamus Finnigan had lent him, and they didn't trust him at all. He wasn't a very good player yet and they kept shouting different bits of advice at him, which was confusing. "Don't send me there, can't you see his knight? Send *him*, we can afford to lose *him*."

On Christmas Eve, Harry went to bed looking forward to the next day for the food and the fun, but not expecting any presents at all. When he woke early in the morning, however, the first thing he saw was a small pile of packages at the foot of his bed.

"Merry Christmas," said Ron sleepily as Harry scrambled out of bed and pulled on his bathrobe.

"You, too," said Harry. "Will you look at this? I've got some presents!"

“What did you expect, turnips?” said Ron, turning to his own pile, which was a lot bigger than Harry’s.

Harry picked up the top parcel. It was wrapped in thick brown paper and scrawled across it was *To Harry, from Hagrid*. Inside was a roughly cut wooden flute. Hagrid had obviously whittled it himself. Harry blew it — it sounded a bit like an owl.

A second, very small parcel contained a note.

We received your message and enclose your Christmas present. From Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia. Taped to the note was a fifty-pence piece.

“That’s friendly,” said Harry.

Ron was fascinated by the fifty pence.

“*Weird!*” he said, “What a shape! This is *money*?”

“You can keep it,” said Harry, laughing at how pleased Ron was.

“Hagrid and my aunt and uncle — so who sent these?”

“I think I know who that one’s from,” said Ron, turning a bit pink and pointing to a very lumpy parcel. “My mum. I told her you didn’t expect any presents and — oh, no,” he groaned, “she’s made you a Weasley sweater.”

Harry had torn open the parcel to find a thick, hand-knitted sweater in emerald green and a large box of homemade fudge.

“Every year she makes us a sweater,” said Ron, unwrapping his own, “and mine’s *always* maroon.”

“That’s really nice of her,” said Harry, trying the fudge, which was very tasty.

His next present also contained candy — a large box of Chocolate Frogs from Hermione.

This only left one parcel. Harry picked it up and felt it. It was very light. He unwrapped it.

Something fluid and silvery gray went slithering to the floor where it lay in gleaming folds. Ron gasped.

“I’ve heard of those,” he said in a hushed voice, dropping the box of Every Flavor Beans he’d gotten from Hermione. “If that’s what I think it is — they’re really rare, and *really* valuable.”

“What is it?”

Harry picked the shining, silvery cloth off the floor. It was strange to the touch, like water woven into material.

“It’s an Invisibility Cloak,” said Ron, a look of awe on his face. “I’m sure it is — try it on.”

Harry threw the Cloak around his shoulders and Ron gave a yell.

“It *is*! Look down!”

Harry looked down at his feet, but they were gone. He dashed to the mirror. Sure enough, his reflection looked back at him, just his head suspended in midair, his body completely invisible. He pulled the Cloak over his head and his reflection vanished completely.

“There’s a note!” said Ron suddenly. “A note fell out of it!”

Harry pulled off the Cloak and seized the letter. Written in narrow, loopy writing he had never seen before were the following words:

Your father left this in my possession before he died. It is time it was returned to you.

Use it well.

A Very Merry Christmas to you

There was no signature. Harry stared at the note. Ron was admiring

the Cloak.

“I’d give *anything* for one of these,” he said. “*Anything*. What’s the matter?”

“Nothing,” said Harry. He felt very strange. Who had sent the Cloak? Had it really once belonged to his father?

Before he could say or think anything else, the dormitory door was flung open and Fred and George Weasley bounded in. Harry stuffed the Cloak quickly out of sight. He didn’t feel like sharing it with anyone else yet.

“Merry Christmas!”

“Hey, look — Harry’s got a Weasley sweater, too!”

Fred and George were wearing blue sweaters, one with a large yellow F on it, the other a G.

“Harry’s is better than ours, though,” said Fred, holding up Harry’s sweater. “She obviously makes more of an effort if you’re not family.”

“Why aren’t you wearing yours, Ron?” George demanded. “Come on, get it on, they’re lovely and warm.”

“I hate maroon,” Ron moaned halfheartedly as he pulled it over his head.

“You haven’t got a letter on yours,” George observed. “I suppose she thinks you don’t forget your name. But we’re not stupid — we know we’re called Gred and Forge.”

“What’s all this noise?”

Percy Weasley stuck his head through the door, looking disapproving. He had clearly gotten halfway through unwrapping his presents as he, too, carried a lumpy sweater over his arm, which

Fred seized.

“P for prefect! Get it on, Percy, come on, we’re all wearing ours, even Harry got one.”

“I — don’t — want —” said Percy thickly, as the twins forced the sweater over his head, knocking his glasses askew.

“And you’re not sitting with the prefects today, either,” said George. “Christmas is a time for family.”

They frog-marched Percy from the room, his arms pinned to his side by his sweater.

Harry had never in all his life had such a Christmas dinner. A hundred fat, roast turkeys; mountains of roast and boiled potatoes; platters of chipolatas; tureens of buttered peas, silver boats of thick, rich gravy and cranberry sauce — and stacks of wizard crackers every few feet along the table. These fantastic party favors were nothing like the feeble Muggle ones the Dursleys usually bought, with their little plastic toys and their flimsy paper hats inside. Harry pulled a wizard cracker with Fred and it didn’t just bang, it went off with a blast like a cannon and engulfed them all in a cloud of blue smoke, while from the inside exploded a rear admiral’s hat and several live, white mice. Up at the High Table, Dumbledore had swapped his pointed wizard’s hat for a flowered bonnet, and was chuckling merrily at a joke Professor Flitwick had just read him.

Flaming Christmas puddings followed the turkey. Percy nearly broke his teeth on a silver Sickle embedded in his slice. Harry watched Hagrid getting redder and redder in the face as he called for more wine, finally kissing Professor McGonagall on the cheek, who, to Harry’s amazement, giggled and blushed, her top hat lopsided.

When Harry finally left the table, he was laden down with a stack of things out of the crackers, including a pack of non-explodable, luminous balloons, a Grow-Your-Own-Warts kit, and his own new wizard chess set. The white mice had disappeared and Harry had a nasty feeling they were going to end up as Mrs. Norris's Christmas dinner.

Harry and the Weasleys spent a happy afternoon having a furious snowball fight on the grounds. Then, cold, wet, and gasping for breath, they returned to the fire in the Gryffindor common room, where Harry broke in his new chess set by losing spectacularly to Ron. He suspected he wouldn't have lost so badly if Percy hadn't tried to help him so much.

After a meal of turkey sandwiches, crumpets, trifle, and Christmas cake, everyone felt too full and sleepy to do much before bed except sit and watch Percy chase Fred and George all over Gryffindor Tower because they'd stolen his prefect badge.

It had been Harry's best Christmas day ever. Yet something had been nagging at the back of his mind all day. Not until he climbed into bed was he free to think about it: the Invisibility Cloak and whoever had sent it.

Ron, full of turkey and cake and with nothing mysterious to bother him, fell asleep almost as soon as he'd drawn the curtains of his four-poster. Harry leaned over the side of his own bed and pulled the Cloak out from under it.

His father's . . . this had been his father's. He let the material flow over his hands, smoother than silk, light as air. *Use it well*, the note had said.

He had to try it, now. He slipped out of bed and wrapped the Cloak around himself. Looking down at his legs, he saw only moonlight and shadows. It was a very funny feeling.

Use it well.

Suddenly, Harry felt wide-awake. The whole of Hogwarts was open to him in this Cloak. Excitement flooded through him as he stood there in the dark and silence. He could go anywhere in this, anywhere, and Filch would never know.

Ron grunted in his sleep. Should Harry wake him? Something held him back — his father's Cloak — he felt that this time — the first time — he wanted to use it alone.

He crept out of the dormitory, down the stairs, across the common room, and climbed through the portrait hole.

"Who's there?" squawked the Fat Lady. Harry said nothing. He walked quickly down the corridor.

Where should he go? He stopped, his heart racing, and thought. And then it came to him. The Restricted Section in the library. He'd be able to read as long as he liked, as long as it took to find out who Flamel was. He set off, drawing the Invisibility Cloak tight around him as he walked.

The library was pitch-black and very eerie. Harry lit a lamp to see his way along the rows of books. The lamp looked as if it was floating along in midair, and even though Harry could feel his arm supporting it, the sight gave him the creeps.

The Restricted Section was right at the back of the library. Stepping carefully over the rope that separated these books from the rest of the library, he held up his lamp to read the titles.

They didn't tell him much. Their peeling, faded gold letters spelled words in languages Harry couldn't understand. Some had no title at all. One book had a dark stain on it that looked horribly like blood. The hairs on the back of Harry's neck prickled. Maybe he was imagining it, maybe not, but he thought a faint whispering was coming from the books, as though they knew someone was there who shouldn't be.

He had to start somewhere. Setting the lamp down carefully on the floor, he looked along the bottom shelf for an interesting-looking book. A large black and silver volume caught his eye. He pulled it out with difficulty, because it was very heavy, and, balancing it on his knee, let it fall open.

A piercing, bloodcurdling shriek split the silence — the book was screaming! Harry snapped it shut, but the shriek went on and on, one high, unbroken, earsplitting note. He stumbled backward and knocked over his lamp, which went out at once. Panicking, he heard footsteps coming down the corridor outside — stuffing the shrieking book back on the shelf, he ran for it. He passed Filch in the doorway; Filch's pale, wild eyes looked straight through him, and Harry slipped under Filch's outstretched arm and streaked off up the corridor, the book's shrieks still ringing in his ears.

He came to a sudden halt in front of a tall suit of armor. He had been so busy getting away from the library, he hadn't paid attention to where he was going. Perhaps because it was dark, he didn't recognize where he was at all. There was a suit of armor near the kitchens, he knew, but he must be five floors above there.

"You asked me to come directly to you, Professor, if anyone was

wandering around at night, and somebody's been in the library — Restricted Section.”

Harry felt the blood drain out of his face. Wherever he was, Filch must know a shortcut, because his soft, greasy voice was getting nearer, and to his horror, it was Snape who replied, “The Restricted Section? Well, they can't be far, we'll catch them.”

Harry stood rooted to the spot as Filch and Snape came around the corner ahead. They couldn't see him, of course, but it was a narrow corridor and if they came much nearer they'd knock right into him — the Cloak didn't stop him from being solid.

He backed away as quietly as he could. A door stood ajar to his left. It was his only hope. He squeezed through it, holding his breath, trying not to move it, and to his relief he managed to get inside the room without their noticing anything. They walked straight past, and Harry leaned against the wall, breathing deeply, listening to their footsteps dying away. That had been close, very close. It was a few seconds before he noticed anything about the room he had hidden in.

It looked like an unused classroom. The dark shapes of desks and chairs were piled against the walls, and there was an upturned wastepaper basket — but propped against the wall facing him was something that didn't look as if it belonged there, something that looked as if someone had just put it there to keep it out of the way.

It was a magnificent mirror, as high as the ceiling, with an ornate gold frame, standing on two clawed feet. There was an inscription carved around the top: *Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi*.

His panic fading now that there was no sound of Filch and Snape, Harry moved nearer to the mirror, wanting to look at himself but see

no reflection again. He stepped in front of it.

He had to clap his hands to his mouth to stop himself from screaming. He whirled around. His heart was pounding far more furiously than when the book had screamed — for he had seen not only himself in the mirror, but a whole crowd of people standing right behind him.

But the room was empty. Breathing very fast, he turned slowly back to the mirror.

There he was, reflected in it, white and scared-looking, and there, reflected behind him, were at least ten others. Harry looked over his shoulder — but still, no one was there. Or were they all invisible, too? Was he in fact in a room full of invisible people and this mirror's trick was that it reflected them, invisible or not?

He looked in the mirror again. A woman standing right behind his reflection was smiling at him and waving. He reached out a hand and felt the air behind him. If she was really there, he'd touch her, their reflections were so close together, but he felt only air — she and the others existed only in the mirror.

She was a very pretty woman. She had dark red hair and her eyes — *her eyes are just like mine*, Harry thought, edging a little closer to the glass. Bright green — exactly the same shape, but then he noticed that she was crying, smiling, but crying at the same time. The tall, thin, black-haired man standing next to her put his arm around her. He wore glasses, and his hair was very untidy. It stuck up at the back, just as Harry's did.

Harry was so close to the mirror now that his nose was nearly touching that of his reflection.

“Mum?” he whispered. “Dad?”

They just looked at him, smiling. And slowly, Harry looked into the faces of the other people in the mirror, and saw other pairs of green eyes like his, other noses like his, even a little old man who looked as though he had Harry’s knobbly knees — Harry was looking at his family, for the first time in his life.

The Potters smiled and waved at Harry and he stared hungrily back at them, his hands pressed flat against the glass as though he was hoping to fall right through it and reach them. He had a powerful kind of ache inside him, half joy, half terrible sadness.

How long he stood there, he didn’t know. The reflections did not fade and he looked and looked until a distant noise brought him back to his senses. He couldn’t stay here, he had to find his way back to bed. He tore his eyes away from his mother’s face, whispered, “I’ll come back,” and hurried from the room.

“You could have woken me up,” said Ron, crossly.

“You can come tonight, I’m going back, I want to show you the mirror.”

“I’d like to see your mum and dad,” Ron said eagerly.

“And I want to see all your family, all the Weasleys, you’ll be able to show me your other brothers and everyone.”

“You can see them any old time,” said Ron. “Just come round my house this summer. Anyway, maybe it only shows dead people. Shame about not finding Flamel, though. Have some bacon or something, why aren’t you eating anything?”

Harry couldn’t eat. He had seen his parents and would be seeing them again tonight. He had almost forgotten about Flamel. It didn’t

seem very important anymore. Who cared what the three-headed dog was guarding? What did it matter if Snape stole it, really?

“Are you all right?” said Ron. “You look odd.”

What Harry feared most was that he might not be able to find the mirror room again. With Ron covered in the Cloak, too, they had to walk much more slowly the next night. They tried retracing Harry’s route from the library, wandering around the dark passageways for nearly an hour.

“I’m freezing,” said Ron. “Let’s forget it and go back.”

“No!” Harry hissed. “I know it’s here somewhere.”

They passed the ghost of a tall witch gliding in the opposite direction, but saw no one else. Just as Ron started moaning that his feet were dead with cold, Harry spotted the suit of armor.

“It’s here — just here — yes!”

They pushed the door open. Harry dropped the Cloak from around his shoulders and ran to the mirror.

There they were. His mother and father beamed at the sight of him.

“See?” Harry whispered.

“I can’t see anything.”

“Look! Look at them all . . . there are loads of them . . .”

“I can only see you.”

“Look in it properly, go on, stand where I am.”

Harry stepped aside, but with Ron in front of the mirror, he couldn’t see his family anymore, just Ron in his paisley pajamas.

Ron, though, was staring transfixed at his image.

“Look at me!” he said.

“Can you see all your family standing around you?”

“No — I’m alone — but I’m different — I look older — and I’m Head Boy!”

“*What?*”

“I am — I’m wearing the badge like Bill used to — and I’m holding the House Cup and the Quidditch Cup — I’m Quidditch captain, too!”

Ron tore his eyes away from this splendid sight to look excitedly at Harry.

“Do you think this mirror shows the future?”

“How can it? All my family are dead — let me have another look —”

“You had it to yourself all last night, give me a bit more time.”

“You’re only holding the Quidditch Cup, what’s interesting about that? I want to see my parents.”

“Don’t push me —”

A sudden noise outside in the corridor put an end to their discussion. They hadn’t realized how loudly they had been talking.

“Quick!”

Ron threw the Cloak back over them as the luminous eyes of Mrs. Norris came round the door. Ron and Harry stood quite still, both thinking the same thing — did the Cloak work on cats? After what seemed an age, she turned and left.

“This isn’t safe — she might have gone for Filch, I bet she heard us. Come on.”

And Ron pulled Harry out of the room.

The snow still hadn’t melted the next morning.

“Want to play chess, Harry?” said Ron.

“No.”

“Why don’t we go down and visit Hagrid?”

“No . . . you go . . .”

“I know what you’re thinking about, Harry, that mirror. Don’t go back tonight.”

“Why not?”

“I dunno, I’ve just got a bad feeling about it — and anyway, you’ve had too many close shaves already. Filch, Snape, and Mrs. Norris are wandering around. So what if they can’t see you? What if they walk into you? What if you knock something over?”

“You sound like Hermione.”

“I’m serious, Harry, don’t go.”

But Harry only had one thought in his head, which was to get back in front of the mirror, and Ron wasn’t going to stop him.

That third night he found his way more quickly than before. He was walking so fast he knew he was making more noise than was wise, but he didn’t meet anyone.

And there were his mother and father smiling at him again, and one of his grandfathers nodding happily. Harry sank down to sit on the floor in front of the mirror. There was nothing to stop him from staying here all night with his family. Nothing at all.

Except —

“So — back again, Harry?”

Harry felt as though his insides had turned to ice. He looked behind him. Sitting on one of the desks by the wall was none other than Albus Dumbledore. Harry must have walked straight past him, so desperate to get to the mirror he hadn’t noticed him.

“I — I didn’t see you, sir.”

“Strange how nearsighted being invisible can make you,” said Dumbledore, and Harry was relieved to see that he was smiling.

“So,” said Dumbledore, slipping off the desk to sit on the floor with Harry, “you, like hundreds before you, have discovered the delights of the Mirror of Erised.”

“I didn’t know it was called that, sir.”

“But I expect you’ve realized by now what it does?”

“It — well — it shows me my family —”

“And it showed your friend Ron himself as Head Boy.”

“How did you know — ?”

“I don’t need a cloak to become invisible,” said Dumbledore gently. “Now, can you think what the Mirror of Erised shows us all?” Harry shook his head.

“Let me explain. The happiest man on earth would be able to use the Mirror of Erised like a normal mirror, that is, he would look into it and see himself exactly as he is. Does that help?”

Harry thought. Then he said slowly, “It shows us what we want . . . whatever we want . . .”

“Yes and no,” said Dumbledore quietly. “It shows us nothing more or less than the deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts. You, who have never known your family, see them standing around you. Ronald Weasley, who has always been overshadowed by his brothers, sees himself standing alone, the best of all of them. However, this mirror will give us neither knowledge or truth. Men have wasted away before it, entranced by what they have seen, or been driven mad, not knowing if what it shows is real or even

possible.

“The Mirror will be moved to a new home tomorrow, Harry, and I ask you not to go looking for it again. If you ever *do* run across it, you will now be prepared. It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live, remember that. Now, why don’t you put that admirable Cloak back on and get off to bed?”

Harry stood up.

“Sir — Professor Dumbledore? Can I ask you something?”

“Obviously, you’ve just done so,” Dumbledore smiled. “You may ask me one more thing, however.”

“What do you see when you look in the mirror?”

“I? I see myself holding a pair of thick, woolen socks.”

Harry stared.

“One can never have enough socks,” said Dumbledore. “Another Christmas has come and gone and I didn’t get a single pair. People will insist on giving me books.”

It was only when he was back in bed that it struck Harry that Dumbledore might not have been quite truthful. But then, he thought, as he shoved Scabbers off his pillow, it had been quite a personal question.

Die Spieël van Etreegeb

Kersfees is op hande. Een oggend vroeg, so in die middel van Desember, word Hogwarts onder 'n kombers van sneeu wakker. Die meer is solied bevrore en die Weasley-tweeling word gestraf omdat hulle 'n paar sneeuballe getoor het om al agter Quirrell aan te vlieg en teen die agterkant van sy tulband te bons. Die paar uile wat dit regkry om deur die storms te veg en die pos af te lewer, moet eers by Hagrid aansterk voor hulle die pad terug kan aanpak.

Niemand kan wag dat die vakansie moet begin nie. Hoewel daar groot vure in die Griffindor-geselskamer en in die Groot Saal brand, is die trekkerige gange ysig koud en 'n sterk wind ratel die klaskamers se vensters. Professor Snerp se klasse onder in die kerkers is die ergste. Hier rys hul asems soos mis voor hulle op en almal staan so na aan hul warm heksetels as wat hulle maar kan.

“Ek voel so jammer,” sê Draco Malfoy tydens een Towerdrankie-klas, “vir al die mense wat oor die Kersvakansie by Hogwarts moet bly. Dit omdat niemand hulle by die huis wil hê nie.”

Hy kyk reguit na Harry terwyl hy praat. Krabbe en Goliat grinnik. Harry, wat besig is om verpoeierde ruggraat van leeuvis af te meet, ignoreer hulle. Sedert die Kwiddiek-wedstryd is Malfoy nog onplesieriger as tevore. Hy is omgekrap omdat Slibberin verloor het en maak gedurig grappies oor hoe 'n breëbekboompadda van nou af in Harry se plek Soeker gaan speel. Hy besef egter gou dat niemand dink dis snaaks nie; almal is te beïndruk met die manier hoe Harry bo-op sy bokspringende besem gebly het. Jaloers en kwaad, terg Malfoy nou weer vir Harry omdat hy nie regte familie het nie.

Dit is wel so dat Harry nie vir Kersfees na Ligusterlaan toe gaan nie. Professor McGonagall het die week tevore 'n lys gemaak van al die studente wat tydens die vakansie by Hogwarts gaan bly. Harry het dadelik sy naam opgesit. Hy is glad nie jammer vir homself nie; dit gaan waarskynlik die beste vakansie wees wat hy nog ooit gehad het. Ron en sy broers bly ook, want hul ma en pa gaan by Charlie in Roemenië kuier.

Toe hulle na die Towerdrankie-klas by die kerkers uitstap, staan daar

'n enorme denneboom in die gang voor hulle. Twee yslike voete steek onder uit en 'n harde geblaas verklap dat dit Hagrid is wat die boom vas-hou.

"Hallo, Hagrid, kan ons jou help?" vra Ron en steek sy kop deur die takke.

"Nee, ek kom reg, dankie, Ron."

"Sal julle omgee om pad te gee?" kom Malfoy se koue dralende stem van agter hulle. "Probeer jy dalkies ekstra geld verdien, Weasley? Hoop seker jy kan eendag boswagter wees wanneer jy hier by Hogwarts uitstap – daardie hut van Hagrid moet vir jou soos 'n paleis lyk na dit waaraan julle Weasleys gewoond is."

Ron duik na Malfoy net toe Snerp teen die trappe opkom.

"WEASLEY!"

Ron laat los die voorpante van Malfoy se kleed.

"Hy's getart, professor Snerp," sê Hagrid en steek sy harige gesig agter die boom uit. "Malfoy het sy familie beledig."

"Maak nie saak nie, baklei is teen Hogwarts se reëls, Hagrid," sê professor Snerp gladweg. "Vyf punte af vir Griffindor, Weasley, en wees dankbaar dat dit nie meer is nie. Loop nou, almal van julle."

Malfoy, Krabbe en Goliat grinnik en druk lomp verby die boom sodat die dennenaalde oor die vloer gesaai word.

"Ek sal hom kry," sê Ron en kners sy tande agter Malfoy se rug, "een van die dae sal ek hom –"

"Ek haat hulle albei," sê Harry, "Malfoy en Snerp."

"Komaan, ruk julle reg, dis amper Kersfees," sê Hagrid. "Sê julle wat, kom saam met my en kom kyk hoe lyk die Groot Saal. Dis verskriklik mooi."

Die driestuks volg Hagrid en sy boom tot in die saal waar professor McGonagall en professor Flickerpitt met die Kersversierings doenig is.

"A, Hagrid, die laaste boom – sit dit in die verste hoek, dankie."

Die saal lyk fantasties. Slingers van huls en mistel hang teen die mure en nie minder nie as twaalf Kersbome toring bo die tafels uit, party skitter met klein ysnaalde, ander glinster met honderde kerse.

"Nog hoeveel dae voor die vakansie begin?" vra Hagrid.

"Net een," sê Hermien. "Dit laat my dink – Harry, Ron, daar's nog 'n halfuur voor ete, ons behoort in die biblioteek te wees."

"H'm, ja, jy's seker reg," sê Ron en skeur sy oë weg van professor Flickerpitt wat goue belle uit sy towerstaf laat borrel en oor die takke van die nuwe boom drapeer.

"Die biblioteek?" sê Hagrid en stap agter hulle aan uit die saal. "Net voor die vakansie? Julle is fluks."

"O, dis nie werk nie," sê Harry vrolik. "Vandat jy Nicolas Flamel se naam genoem het, probeer ons uitvind wie hy is."

“Julle doen *wat?*” Hagrid lyk geskok. “Luister hier – ek het gesê – los dit. Dit het niks met julle drie uit te waai wat daardie hond daar oppas nie.”

“Ons wil net weet wie Nicolas Flamel is, dis al,” sê Hermien.

“Behalwe as jy vir ons wil sê en ons die moeite spaar?” voeg Harry by. “Ons is al deur honderde boeke en daar’s niks oor hom nie – gee ons net ’n wenk – ek is seker ek het sy naam al iewers gelees.”

“Ek sê niks,” sê Hagrid ferm.

“Dan moet ons maar self uitvind,” sê Ron en hulle los Hagrid, wat erg omgekrap lyk, net daar en haas hulle na die biblioteek.

Hulle soek Flamel se naam werklik al sedert Hagrid dit laat glip het, want hoe anders kan hulle uitvind wat dit is wat Snerp wil steel? Dis net baie moeilik om te weet waar om te begin, want hulle het nie ’n idee wat Flamel gedoen het om in ’n boek te kom nie. Hy is nie in *Groot Townaars van die Twintigste Eeu* nie, ook nie in *Merkwaardige Townaarsname van ons Tyd* nie; sy naam is nêrens in *Belangrike Moderne Toorontdekkings* nie en ook nie in ’n *Studie van die Mees Onlangse Ontwikkelings in die Towerkuns* nie. Dan is die biblioteek natuurlik ook ongelooflik groot; tienduizende boeke; duisende rakke; honderde smal gangetjies.

Hermien haal die lys met die onderwerpe en titels waarna sy soek uit haar sak, terwyl Ron langs ’n ry boeke stap en hier en daar een uit die rakke haal. Harry dwaal in die rigting van die Beperkte Afdeling. Dis al ’n geruime tyd dat hy wonder of Flamel nie daar iewers is nie. Ongelukkig moet jy ’n spesiale getekende briefie van ’n onderwyser hê as jy in die beperkte boeke wil kyk en hy weet hy sal nooit een kry nie. In hierdie boeke skuil kragtige Donker toorkuns wat nie by Hogwarts do-seer word nie. Net ouer studente wat Gevorderde Verdediging teen die Donker Kunste bestudeer, mag dit lees.

“Waarna soek jy, seun?”

“Niks nie,” sê Harry.

Madame Pince, die bibliotekaresse, swaai ’n stoffer in sy rigting.

“Jy moet liewer loop. Toe-toe, weg is jy – uit!”

Harry wens hy was beter met verskonings uitdink. Hy, Ron en Hermien het besluit hulle gaan nie vir Madame Pince vra waar hulle iets oor Flamel kan kry nie. Hulle is seker sy sal weet, maar hulle is bang Snerp kom agter waarmee hulle besig is.

Harry wag in die gang om te sien of die ander twee iets regkry, maar sy hoop is min. Hulle soek al langer as twee weke, en omdat hulle net kort tydjes tussen periodes het, is dit nie snaaks dat hulle nog niks gekry het nie. Wat hulle nodig het, is ’n lekker lang soektog sonder Madame Pince wat hulle dophou.

Vyf minute later sluit Ron en Hermien by hom aan. Hulle skud hul koppe. Toe gaan hulle eetsaal toe.

“Julle sal aanhou soek terwyl ek weg is, nè?” vra Hermien. “En stuur ’n uil as julle iets kry.”

“Jy kan jou ouers vra of hulle weet wie Flamel is,” sê Ron. “Dit behoort veilig te wees.”

“Baie veilig, hulle is albei tandartse,” sê Hermien.

Toe die vakansie begin, het Ron en Harry gans te veel pret om aan Flamel te dink. Die hele slaapsaal is hulle s’n en die geselskamer is leër as gewoonlik, sodat hulle goeie gemakstoele by die vuur kan kry. Hulle sit ure voor die vuur en rooster alles waarop hulle hul hande kan lê – brood, plaatkoekies, malvalekkers – en dink aan maniere om Malfoy geskors te kry, wat pret is om oor te praat, al weet hulle dit sal nie werk nie.

Ron begin ook vir Harry towerskaak leer. Dit is presies soos Moggelskaak, behalwe dat die figuurtjies lewe, sodat dit baie is soos om troepe oorlog toe te stuur. Ron se stel is oud en gehawend. Soos alles wat hy besit, het dit vroeër aan iemand anders in die familie behoort – in hierdie geval, sy oupa. Die ou skaakmannetjies is egter nie ’n nadeel nie. Ron ken hulle so goed, hy sukkel glad nie om hulle te oorreed om te maak soos hy sê nie.

Harry speel met skaakmannetjies wat Septimus Floris vir hom geleen het en hulle vertrou hom glad nie. Harry is nie ’n bedrewe speler nie en hulle hou aan om hom raad te gee wat hom net deurmekaar maak. Dinge soos, “Moet my nie *hierheen* stuur nie, kan jy nie sy ridder sien nie? Stuur *hom*, ons kan bekostig om *hom* te verloor.”

Toe Harry op Kersaand bed toe gaan, sien hy uit na die volgende dag se kos en pret, maar hy verwag geen presente nie. Tog is die eerste ding wat hy die volgende oggend sien, ’n klein hopie pakkies aan die voet van sy bed.

“Geseënde Kersfees,” sê Ron slaperig toe Harry uit die bed spring en sy kamerjas aanpluk.

“Jy ook,” sê Harry. “Kyk net hier. Ek het sowaar presente!”

“Wat het jy verwag, *rape*?” sê Ron en draai na sy eie hoop wat baie groter as Harry s’n is.

Harry tel die boonste pakkie op. Dis toegedraai in dik bruinpapier en daar staan *Vir Harry, Van Hagrid* op. Binne-in is ’n grofgesnede houtfluit. Hagrid moet dit self gemaak het. Harry blaas daarop – dit klink soos ’n uil se roep.

’n Tweede, baie klein pakkie, bevat ’n nota.

Ons het jou boodskap gekry en stuur jou Kersgeskenk. Van oom Vernon en tant Petunia. Vasgeplak aan die nota is ’n vyftigpenniestuk.

“Dis gaaf,” sê Harry.

Ron is betower deur die munt.

“Koddig!” sê hy. “Snaakse vorm! Is dit geld?”

“Jy kan dit maar kry,” sê Harry en lag oor Ron se plesier. “Hagrid en my oom en tante – so van wie kom die res?”

“Ek dink ek weet,” sê Ron en sy ore word ’n bietjie pienk en hy wys na ’n bultende pakkie op die bed. “My ma. Ek het vir haar gesê jy sê jy verwag nie enige presente nie en – o, nee,” kreun hy, “sy’t vir jou ’n Weasley-trui gebrei.”

Harry het die pakkie oopgeskeur en ’n dik, handgebreide trui in smaraggroen uitgehaal, sowel as ’n yslike doos tuisgemaakte fudge.

“Dis regtig baie gaaf van haar,” sê Harry en probeer ’n blokkie, wat vorentoe smaak.

Sy volgende present is ook lekkers – ’n groot doos Sjokoladepaddas van Hermien.

Daar is nog een pakkie. Harry tel dit op en bevoel dit. Dis baie lig. Hy maak dit oop.

Iets vloeibaars en silwergrys glip uit en val in glimmende voue op die vloer. Ron snak na asem.

“Ek het al hiervan gehoor,” sê hy in ’n gedempte stem en laat sak die doos Sjokoladepaddas wat hy by Hermien gekry het. “As dit is wat ek dink dit is – is dit baie skaars en regtig *baie* kosbaar.”

“Wat is dit?”

Harry tel die silwerblink lap van die vloer af op. Dit voel vreemd, soos materiaal wat uit water geweef is.

“Dis ’n onsigbaarheidmantel,” sê Ron met ’n uitdrukking van vervoe-ring op sy gesig. “Ek is seker dit is – sit dit om.”

Harry gooi die mantel oor sy skouers en Ron uiter ’n kreet.

“Dit is! Kyk af!”

Harry kyk na sy voete, maar hulle is weg. Hy storm na die spieël. Sowaar, dis net sy kop wat in die lug hang, sy lyf is onsigbaar. Hy trek die mantel oor sy kop en sy weerkaatsing verdwyn.

“Daar’s ’n briefie!” sê Ron skielik. “Daar’t ’n briefie uitgeval!”

Harry gooi die mantel af en raap die briefie op. Dis geskryf in die fyn, krullerige skrif wat hy al tevore gesien het.

Jou pa het dit voor sy dood in my besit gelaat.

Dis tyd dat jy dit kry. Gebruik dit met sorg.

’n Baie Geseënde Kersfees vir jou.

Daar is geen naam nie. Harry staar na die briefie. Ron bewonder die mantel.

“Ek sal wat gee om so een te hê,” sê hy. “Enigiets. Wat makeer nou?”

“Niks,” sê Harry. Hy voel vreemd. Wie het die mantel gestuur? Was dit regtig voorheen sy pa s’n?

Voor hy iets anders kan sê of doen, vlieg die slaapsaal se deur oop en

Fred en George Weasley storm in. Harry steek die mantel vinnig weg. Hy kan dit nie nou al met ander mense deel nie.

“Geseënde Kersfees!”

“Haai, kyk – Harry het ook ’n Weasley-trui gekry!”

Fred en George het blou truië aan, een met ’n groot F op die bors en die ander een met ’n G.

“Harry s’n is beter as ons s’n,” sê Fred en tel Harry se trui op. “Sy doen seker meer moeite as jy nie familie is nie.”

“Hoekom het jy nie joune aan nie, Ron?” vra George. “Toe, trek aan, dis lekker warm.”

“Ek haat maroen,” kla Ron halfhartig terwyl hy die trui oor sy kop trek.

“Jy’t nie ’n letter nie,” sê George. “Sy dink seker jy sal nie jou naam vergeet nie. Maar ons is nie onnosel nie – ons weet ons is Gred en George.”

“Wat raas julle so?”

Percy Weasley steek sy kop afkeurend om die deur. Hy is duidelik besig om presente oop te maak, want daar is ’n bonkige trui oor sy arm en Fred gryp dit dadelik.

“P vir Prefek! Toe nou, Percy, ons almal dra ons s’n, tot Harry het een.”

“Ek – wil – nie –” Percy se stem is gedemp deur die trui wat die tweeling oor sy kop forseer, sodat sy bril skeef oor sy neus hang.

“En jy gaan sit ook nie weer die hele dag by die prefekte nie,” sê George. “Kersfees is vir familie.”

Hulle dra-mars Percy uit die vertrek, sy arms vasgepen langs sy sye deur sy trui.

Harry het nog nooit in sy lewe so ’n Krismisete gehad nie. ’n Honderd vet, geroosterde kalkoene, berge gebraaide en gekookte aartappels, borde vol vet chipolatas, kommetjies vol gebotterde ertjies, silwer sousbote vol ryk vleissouse en bosbessiestroop – en stapels toorklappers elke paar tree op die tafel. Hierdie ongelooflike klappers is glad nie soos die vervelige Moggel-klappers wat die Dursleys gewoonlik koop en waarin klein plastiekspeelgoedjies en dun papierhoede is nie. Harry trek ’n toorklapper saam met Fred en dit klap nie net nie, dit gaan af met ’n dawerende knal soos van ’n kanon en vou hulle toe in ’n wolk blou rook. ’n Hoed soos dié wat ’n skoutadmiraal dra, ontplof uit die binnekant, sowel as ’n hele paar lewende wit muise. By die Hoofdtafel het Dompeldorius sy gepunte townaarshoed verruil vir ’n blommetjieskappie en hy lag vrolik vir die grap wat professor Flickerpitt so pas hardop gelees het.

Vlammende Kerspoedings volg op die kalkoen. Percy byt amper ’n tand af op ’n silwer Sekel in sy poeding. Harry sien hoe Hagrid al rooier en rooier in die gesig word terwyl hy vir nog wyn vra. Op die ou end soen

hy vir professor McGonagall skrams op die wang en tot Harry se verbasing giggel en bloos sy, haar keil skeef op haar kop.

Toe Harry uiteindelik die tafel verlaat, is hy oorlaai met 'n stapel goed wat uit die klappers kom, insluitend 'n pakkie glimmende, niebarsbare ballonne, 'n Groei-jou-eie-vratte-stelletjie en sy eie nuwe towenaarskaakstel. Die wit muise het verdwyn en Harry het 'n nare spesmaas dat hulle mev. Norris se Krismisete geword het.

Die middag het Harry en die Weasleys 'n woeste sneeubalgeveg op die terrein. Toe, koud, nat en hygend na asem, gaan hulle terug na die vuur in die Griffindor-geselskamer, waar Harry sy nuwe skaakstel uittoets deur skouspelagtig teen Ron te verloor. Hy reken hy sou dalk beter gevaar het as Percy hom nie die hele tyd raad gegee het nie.

Na 'n ligte aandete van kalkoenbroodjies, plaatkoekies, koekstruif en Krismiskoek voel almal te vol en te vaak om veel meer voor slapenstyd te doen, behalwe om te sit en kyk hoe Percy vir Fred en George in die Griffindor-toring rondjaag omdat hulle sy prefekwapentjie afgevat het.

Dit is Harry se lekkerste Kersdag ooit. Tog is daar iets wat hom al die hele dag pla. Eers toe hy in die bed is, het hy tyd om daaroor te dink: die onsigbaarheidsmantel en wie dit gestuur het.

Ron, vol koek en kalkoen en met niks geheimsinnigs om hom wakker te hou nie, raak amper onmiddellik aan die slaap na hy die gordyne om sy hemelbed toegetrek het. Harry leun oor die kant van sy bed en haal die kleed daaronder uit.

Sy pa s'n . . . dit was sy pa s'n. Hy laat die materiaal deur sy vingers vloei, sagter as sy, so lig soos lug self. *Gebruik dit met sorg*, het die nota gesê.

Hy móét dit net weer probeer, somer nou. Hy glip uit die bed en vou die mantel om hom. Hy kyk af na sy bene en sien net maanskyn en skaduwees. Dis 'n baie snaakse gevoel.

Gebruik dit met sorg.

Skielik is Harry helder wakker. Die hele Hogwarts lê oop voor hom met hierdie mantel. Die opwinding vloei deur hom soos hy daar in die stil donkerte staan. Hy kan orals gaan, orals, en Fillis sal nooit daarvan weet nie.

Ron snork in sy slaap. Moet Harry hom wakker maak? Iets hou hom terug – sy pa se mantel – hierdie keer – die eerste keer – wil hy alleen wees as hy dit gebruik.

Hy sluip uit die slaapsaal, af met die trappe, deur die geselskamer en deur die portretopening.

“Wie is daar?” vra die Vet Vrou. Harry antwoord nie. Hy loop vinnig af in die gang.

Waarheen sal hy gaan? Met 'n kloppende hart steek hy vas en dink. Toe weet hy. Die Verbode Afdeling in die biblioteek. Hy sal kan lees so

lank as wat hy wil, so lank as wat dit nodig is om uit te vind wie Flamel is. Hy trek die onsigbaarheidsmantel stywer vas en stap aan.

Die biblioteek is pikdonker en baie grillerig. Harry steek 'n lamp aan sodat hy kan sien waar hy tussen die boeke beweeg. Dit lyk of die lamp in die lug sweef en hoewel Harry kan voel dat hy dit vashou, is dit nog steeds baie grieselig.

Die Verbode Afdeling is heel aan die agterkant van die biblioteek. Hy klim versigtig oor die tou wat hierdie boeke van die res van die biblioteek skei, hou sy lamp op en lees die titels.

Hy word nie veel wys nie. Die afgeskilferde, verbleikte goue letters spel woorde in vreemde tale uit wat Harry nie verstaan nie. Sommiges het geen titels nie. Op een van die boeke is 'n donker vlek wat vreeslik baie soos bloed lyk. Die hare in Harry se nek staan regop. Dalk verbeel hy hom net, dalk nie, maar dis of daar 'n sagte gefluister van die boeke af kom, asof hulle weet dat daar iemand is wat nie daar mag wees nie.

Hy moet iewers begin. Hy sit die lamp versigtig op die vloer neer en kyk op die onderste rak of daar 'n boek is wat interessant lyk. 'n Groot swart-en-silwer eksemplaar vang sy oog. Dis baie swaar en hy sukkel om dit uit te trek. Toe balanseer hy dit op sy been en laat die blaaie oopval.

'n Deurdringende, bloedstollende kreet klief deur die stilte – dis die boek wat skree! Harry slaan dit toe, maar die kreet gaan aan en aan op een hoë ononderbroke, skril noot. Hy steier agtertoe en stamp die lamp om, wat dadelik doodgaan. Nou is hy goed bang. Hy hoor voetstappe in die gang daar buite – hy prop die skreeuende boek terug in die rak en laat spaander. Hy hardloop verby Fillis in die deur; Fillis se bleek, wilde oë kyk regdeur hom en Harry glip onderdeur sy uitgestrekte arm en nael af in die gang, met die geskree van die boek wat nog steeds in sy ore weergalm.

Voor 'n lang wapenrusting kom hy tot stilstand. Hy was so gretig om van die biblioteek af weg te kom, hy't vergeet om te kyk waarheen hy gaan. Nou weet hy glad nie waar hy is nie, dalk omdat dit so donker is. Daar is 'n wapenrusting naby die kombuis, dit weet hy, maar hy moet ten minste vyf verdiepings bo die kombuis wees.

“U het gesê ek moet direk na u toe kom indien iemand snags rondloop en daar was iemand in die biblioteek, professor – in die Beperkte Afdeling.”

Harry voel hoe die bloed sy gesig verlaat. Waar hy ook al mag wees, Fillis moet 'n kortpad hê, want sy saggie, olierige stem kom al nader, en tot Harry se skok is dit Snerp wat hom antwoord:

“Die Beperkte Afdeling? Wel, hulle kan nie ver wees nie, ons sal hulle beslis vang.”

Harry staan vasgemaak en kyk hoe Fillis en Snerp om die draai voor hom kom. Hulle kan hom natuurlik nie sien nie, maar dis 'n nou gang,

en as hulle verby hom stap, raak hulle dalk aan hom – hy is nog steeds solied, al het hy die mantel om.

Hy tree versigtig agteruit. Net links agter hom staan 'n deur halfoop. Dit is sy enigste kans. Hy hou sy asem in, glip om die deur en doen sy bes om dit nie te laat roer nie. Tot sy verligting kom hy in die kamer sonder dat hulle iets merk. Hulle stap verby en Harry leun teen die muur, haal diep asem en luister hoe hul voetstappe wegsterf. Dit was amper, baie amper. Dit neem 'n paar sekondes voor hy behoorlik kan sien wat aangaan in die kamer waarin hy wegkruip.

Dit lyk soos 'n klaskamer wat nie meer gebruik word nie. Daar is donker vorms van lessenaars en stoele wat teen die mure opgestapel is en 'n omgedopte snippermandjie – maar teen die muur regoor hom staan iets wat lyk of dit nie daar hoort nie, iets wat lyk of iemand dit daar gesit het sodat dit uit die pad moet wees.

Dis 'n manjifieke spieël, so hoog soos die plafon en met 'n ryklik versierde goue raam en dit staan op twee bal-en-klou-pote. Aan die bokant is 'n inskripsie uitgekerf: *Etreegeb es trahu oj lewe ingis egu ojein sywke*.

Harry voel heelwat beter nou dat hy nie meer vir Fillis en Snerp kan hoor nie. Hy beweeg nader aan die spieël, maar tot sy verbasing sien hy geen weerkaatsing nie. Hy tree tot reg voor die spieël.

Toe moet hy sy hand oor sy mond klap om nie hardop te skree nie. Hy swaai vinnig om. Sy hart klop nog vinniger as toe die boek so geskree het – hy het nie net homself in die spieël gesien nie, maar ook 'n hele klomp mense wat agter hom staan.

Maar die vertrek is leeg. Harry trek sy asem vinnig in. Stadig draai hy terug na die spieël.

Daar is hy, sy weerkaatsing; hy lyk wit en bang en om hom staan ten minste nog tien mense. Weer kyk Harry oor sy skouer – daar is nog steeds niemand nie. Of is hulle ook onsigbaar? Is hy in 'n vertrek vol onsigbare mense en kan hierdie spieël daardie onsigbare mense se beelde weerkaats?

Weer kyk hy in die spieël. Reg agter hom staan 'n vrou en haar spieëlbeeld glimlag vir hom en sy waai. Hy steek 'n hand uit en voel in die lug agter hom. As sy regtig daar is, sal hy aan haar kan raak, hul beelde is so na aan mekaar, maar hy voel net lug – sy en al die ander bestaan dus net in die spieël.

Dis 'n baie mooi vrou. Sy het donkerrooi hare en haar oë – haar oë lyk nes myne, dink Harry en skuifel nader aan die spieël. Helder groen oë – presies dieselfde vorm, maar nou merk hy op dat sy huil; sy glimlag, maar huil terselfdertyd. Die lang, skraal donkerkopman langs haar sit sy arm om haar. Hy dra 'n bril en sy hare is deurmekaar; dit staan regop nes Harry s'n.

Nou is Harry so na aan die spieël dat sy neus amper aan sy eie weerkaatsing raak.

“Ma?” fluister hy. “Pa?”

Hulle kyk net na hom en glimlag. Stadig kyk Harry na die gesigte van die ander mense in die spieël en hy sien ander pare oë, groen soos syne, nog neuse soos syne, selfs ’n ouerige man wat lyk of hy Harry se knopknieë het – vir die eerste keer in sy bewuste lewe kyk Harry na sy familie.

Die Potters glimlag en waai vir Harry en hy staar hongerig terug na hulle, sy hande plat teen die glas asof hy daardeur wil val sodat hy by hulle kan wees. Binne-in hom voel hy ’n skerp pyn, half blydschap, half diepe weemoed.

Hoe lank hy daar gestaan het, sal hy nooit weet nie. Die beelde vervaag nie en hy kyk en kyk tot ’n geluid in die verte hom tot sy sinne bring. Hy kan nie hier bly nie, hy moet die pad na sy kamer soek. Hy skeur sy oë weg van sy ma se gesig en fluister, “Ek sal weer kom.” Toe haas hy hom uit die vertrek.

“Jy moes my wakker gemaak het,” sê Ron verontwaardig.

“Jy kan vanaand kom, ek gaan weer, ek wil jou die spieël wys.”

“Ek sal graag jou ma en pa wil sien,” sê Ron gretig.

“En ek wil jou hele familie sien, al die Weasleys, jy kan my al jou ander broers en almal wys.”

“Jy kan hulle enige tyd sien,” sê Ron. “Kom net saam met my huis toe hierdie somer. Maar wie sê, dalk wys dit net mense wat dood is. Dis jammer jy kon nie vir Flamel kry nie. Kry ’n bietjie spek of iets, hoekom eet jy niks nie?”

Harry kan nie eet nie. Hy het sy ouers gesien en hy sal hulle vanaand weer sien. Hy het amper van Flamel vergeet. Dit is net skielik nie meer baie belangrik nie. Wat maak dit tog saak wat dit is wat die driekoppige hond oppas? Wat maak dit saak of Snerp dit wil steel of nie?

“Voel jy sleg?” vra Ron. “Jy lyk snaaks.”

Dit waarvoor Harry die bangste is, is dat hy die vertrek met die spieël nie weer sal kry nie. Met Ron saam met hom onder die mantel, moet hulle baie stadiger loop. Hulle probeer om Harry se roete van die biblioteek af te volg, en dwaal amper ’n uur in die donker gange rond.

“Ek vries,” sê Ron. “Kom ons los dit en gaan slaap.”

“Nee!” kap Harry teen. “Dit is hier iewers, ek weet dit.”

Hulle stap verby die spook van ’n lang heks wat in die teenoorgestelde rigting sweef, maar sien niemand anders nie. Net toe Ron begin kla dat sy voete mordsdood van die koue is, sien Harry die wapenrusting.

“Dis hier – net hier – ja!”

Hulle stoot die deur oop. Harry glip onder die mantel uit en haas hom na die spieël.

Hulle is daar. Sy ma en pa straal toe hulle hom sien.

"Sien," fluister Harry.

"Ek kan niks sien nie."

"Kyk! Kyk na hulle . . . daar's 'n hele klomp . . ."

"Ek sien net vir jou."

"Kyk behoorlik, toe, staan hier waar ek staan."

Harry gee pad, maar met Ron voor die spieël sien hy nie meer sy familie nie, net Ron in sy paisley pajamas.

Ron staar egter stip na sy eie weerkaatsing.

"Kyk na my!" sê hy.

"Kan jy ook jou hele familie om jou sien staan?"

"Nee – ek is alleen – maar ek is anders – ek lyk ouer – en ek is hoofseun!"

"Wat?"

"Ek is – ek het hierdie wapen soos Bill gehad het – en ek hou die huisbeker vas en die Kwiddiek-beker – ek is ook kaptein van die Kwiddiekspan!"

Ron skeur sy oë weg van hierdie wonderlike gesig en staar opgewonde na Harry.

"Dink jy hierdie spieël wys die toekoms?"

"Hoe kan dit? Al my mense is dood – laat ek nou weer kyk."

"Jy het dit laas nag die hele tyd gehad, dis nou my beurt."

"Jy hou net die ou Kwiddiek-beker vas, wat is so wonderlik daaraan? Ek wil my ma-hulle sien."

"Moenie aan my stamp nie –"

'n Skielike geluid buite in die gang laat hulle eensklaps stil word. Hulle het glad nie besef hoe hard hulle praat nie.

"Gou!"

Ron gooi die mantel oor hulle net toe mev. Norris se glimmende oë om die deur kom. Ron en Harry staan doodstil, albei van hulle dink aan een en dieselfde ding – werk die mantel ook met katte? Na wat soos 'n eeu voel, draai sy om en stap uit.

"Ons is nie veilig nie – sê nou sy't vir Fillis gaan haal, ek wed sy't ons gehoor. Kom."

Ron trek vir Harry uit die kamer.

Die volgende oggend het die sneeu nog steeds nie gesmelt nie.

"Lus vir 'n potjie skaak, Harry?"

"Nee."

"Hoekom gaan kuier ons nie vir Hagrid nie?"

"Nee . . . gaan jy maar . . ."

"Ek weet waaraan jy dink, Harry, daardie spieël. Moenie vannag weer gaan nie."

“Hoekom nie?”

“Weet nie, ek het net so ’n slegte gevoel daaroor – wat meer is, jy’t reeds te veel noue ontkomings gehad. Fillis, Snerp en mev. Norris loop almal snags rond. Dis nie genoeg dat hulle jou nie kan sien nie. Wat as hulle in jou vasloop? Wat as jy iets omstamp?”

“Jy klink nes Hermien.”

“Ek bedoel dit, Harry, moenie gaan nie.”

Maar Harry het net een gedagte in sy kop en dit is om weer voor die spieël te staan, en Ron gaan hom nie keer nie.

Die derde nag kry hy sy pad baie gouer as tevore. Hy stap so vinnig, hy weet hy maak meer geraas as wat wys is, maar gelukkig loop hy niemand raak nie.

En daar glimlag sy ma en pa weer vir hom, en een van sy oupas knik, bly om hom te sien. Harry sak neer op die vloer voor die spieël. Daar is niks wat hom gaan keer om die hele nag hier by sy familie te bly nie. Absoluut niks.

Behalwe –

“So – weer terug, Harry?”

Dit voel vir Harry of sy binnegoed eensklaps verys. Hy kyk agter hom. Op een van die banke teen die muur sit niemand anders as Albus Dompeldorius nie. Harry moet verby hom geloop het. Hy was so gretig om in die spieël te kyk dat hy hom glad nie gesien het nie.

“Ek – ek het u nie gesien nie, professor.”

“Tog interessant hoe kortsigtig onsigbaarheid ’n mens kan maak,” sê Dompeldorius en Harry is verlig om te sien dat hy glimlag.

“So,” gaan Dompeldorius voort en hy gly van die lessenaar af en gaan sit op die vloer langs Harry. “Jy, soos honderde voor jou, het die vreugdes van die Spieël van Etreegeb ontdek.”

“Ek het nie geweet dit is sy naam nie, professor.”

“Maar jy het darem seker nou al besef wat dit doen?”

“Dit – wel – dit wys my familie vir my –”

“En jou vriend Ron as hoofseun.”

“Hoe weet u – ?”

“Ek het nie ’n mantel nodig om onsigbaar te word nie,” sê Dompeldorius vriendelik. “Nou, kan jy al dink wat die Spieël van Etreegeb vir ons almal wys?”

Harry skud sy kop.

“Laat ek verduidelik. Die gelukkigste mens in die wêreld sal die Spieël van Etreegeb soos ’n gewone spieël kan gebruik, met ander woorde, hy sal daarin kyk en homself sien presies soos hy is. Help dit?”

Harry dink daaroor na. Toe sê hy stadig, “Dit wys ons wat ons wil hê . . . wat dit ook al is . . .”

“Ja en nee,” sê Dompeldorius sag. “Dit wys ons niks anders nie as die diepste, mees desperate begeerte van ons hart. Jy, wat nooit jou familie geken het nie, sien hulle om jou staan. Ronald Weasley, wat nog altyd voel dat sy broers hom oorskadu, sien homself, alleen, die beste van almal. Maar, hierdie spieël wys nie kennis of waarheid nie. Baie mense het weggekwyn voor hierdie spieël, betower deur dit wat hulle sien, of is tot raserny gedryf, omdat hulle nie weet of dit wat hulle sien werklik of selfs moontlik is nie.

“Môre gaan die spieël na ’n nuwe tuiste, Harry, en ek vra jou om dit nie weer te gaan soek nie. Maar as jy dit ooit weer sou teëkom, sal jy weet hoe dit werk. Dit help nie om op drome te fokus en te vergeet om te lewe nie, onthou dit. Hoekom gooi jy nie daardie uitmuntende mantel oor jou kop en gaan terug bed toe nie?”

Harry staan op.

“Meneer – professor Dompeldorius? Mag ek iets vra?”

“Sekerlik, jy het so pas.” Dompeldorius glimlag. “Maar jy mag nog een vraag vra.”

“Wat sien u as u in die spieël kyk?”

“Ek? Ek sien hoe ek ’n paar warm wolkouse vashou.”

Harry staar.

“’n Mens kan nooit genoeg sokkies hê nie,” sê Dompeldorius. “Nog ’n Kersfees is verby sonder dat ek ’n enkele paar gekry het. Mense gee my net boeke.”

Dis eers heelwat later toe hy terug in die bed is dat dit tot Harry deurdring dat Dompeldorius dalk nie heeltemal die waarheid gepraat het nie. Maar, dink hy terwyl hy vir Skille van die kussing af stoot, dit was ’n baie persoonlike vraag.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN



NICOLAS FLAMEL

Dumbledore had convinced Harry not to go looking for the Mirror of Erised again, and for the rest of the Christmas holidays the Invisibility Cloak stayed folded at the bottom of his trunk. Harry wished he could forget what he'd seen in the mirror as easily, but he couldn't. He started having nightmares. Over and over again he dreamed about his parents disappearing in a flash of green light, while a high voice cackled with laughter.

"You see, Dumbledore was right, that mirror could drive you mad," said Ron, when Harry told him about these dreams.

Hermione, who came back the day before term started, took a different view of things. She was torn between horror at the idea of Harry being out of bed, roaming the school three nights in a row ("If Filch had caught you!"), and disappointment that he hadn't at least found out who Nicolas Flamel was.

They had almost given up hope of ever finding Flamel in a library book, even though Harry was still sure he'd read the name somewhere. Once term had started, they were back to skimming through books for ten minutes during their breaks. Harry had even less time than the other two, because Quidditch practice had started again.

Wood was working the team harder than ever. Even the endless rain that had replaced the snow couldn't dampen his spirits. The Weasleys complained that Wood was becoming a fanatic, but Harry was on Wood's side. If they won their next match, against Hufflepuff,

they would overtake Slytherin in the House Championship for the first time in seven years. Quite apart from wanting to win, Harry found that he had fewer nightmares when he was tired out after training.

Then, during one particularly wet and muddy practice session, Wood gave the team a bit of bad news. He'd just gotten very angry with the Weasleys, who kept dive-bombing each other and pretending to fall off their brooms.

"Will you stop messing around!" he yelled. "That's exactly the sort of thing that'll lose us the match! Snape's refereeing this time, and he'll be looking for any excuse to knock points off Gryffindor!"

George Weasley really did fall off his broom at these words.

"*Snape's* refereeing?" he spluttered through a mouthful of mud. "When's he ever refereed a Quidditch match? He's not going to be fair if we might overtake Slytherin."

The rest of the team landed next to George to complain, too.

"It's not *my* fault," said Wood. "We've just got to make sure we play a clean game, so Snape hasn't got an excuse to pick on us."

Which was all very well, thought Harry, but he had another reason for not wanting Snape near him while he was playing Quidditch. . . .

The rest of the team hung back to talk to one another as usual at the end of practice, but Harry headed straight back to the Gryffindor common room, where he found Ron and Hermione playing chess. Chess was the only thing Hermione ever lost at, something Harry and Ron thought was very good for her.

"Don't talk to me for a moment," said Ron when Harry sat down next to him, "I need to concen —" He caught sight of Harry's face.

“What’s the matter with you? You look terrible.”

Speaking quietly so that no one else would hear, Harry told the other two about Snape’s sudden, sinister desire to be a Quidditch referee.

“Don’t play,” said Hermione at once.

“Say you’re ill,” said Ron.

“Pretend to break your leg,” Hermione suggested.

“*Really* break your leg,” said Ron.

“I can’t,” said Harry. “There isn’t a reserve Seeker. If I back out, Gryffindor can’t play at all.”

At that moment Neville toppled into the common room. How he had managed to climb through the portrait hole was anyone’s guess, because his legs had been stuck together with what they recognized at once as the Leg-Locker Curse. He must have had to bunny hop all the way up to Gryffindor Tower.

Everyone fell over laughing except Hermione, who leapt up and performed the countercurse. Neville’s legs sprang apart and he got to his feet, trembling.

“What happened?” Hermione asked him, leading him over to sit with Harry and Ron.

“Malfoy,” said Neville shakily. “I met him outside the library. He said he’d been looking for someone to practice that on.”

“Go to Professor McGonagall!” Hermione urged Neville. “Report him!”

Neville shook his head.

“I don’t want more trouble,” he mumbled.

“You’ve got to stand up to him, Neville!” said Ron. “He’s used to

walking all over people, but that's no reason to lie down in front of him and make it easier."

"There's no need to tell me I'm not brave enough to be in Gryffindor, Malfoy's already done that," Neville choked out.

Harry felt in the pocket of his robes and pulled out a Chocolate Frog, the very last one from the box Hermione had given him for Christmas. He gave it to Neville, who looked as though he might cry.

"You're worth twelve of Malfoy," Harry said. "The Sorting Hat chose you for Gryffindor, didn't it? And where's Malfoy? In stinking Slytherin."

Neville's lips twitched in a weak smile as he unwrapped the frog.

"Thanks, Harry . . . I think I'll go to bed. . . . D'you want the card, you collect them, don't you?"

As Neville walked away, Harry looked at the Famous Wizard card.

"Dumbledore again," he said, "He was the first one I ever —"

He gasped. He stared at the back of the card. Then he looked up at Ron and Hermione.

"*I've found him!*" he whispered. "I've found Flamel! I *told* you I'd read the name somewhere before, I read it on the train coming here — listen to this: 'Dumbledore is particularly famous for his defeat of the Dark wizard Grindelwald in 1945, for the discovery of the twelve uses of dragon's blood, *and his work on alchemy with his partner, Nicolas Flamel*'!"

Hermione jumped to her feet. She hadn't looked so excited since they'd gotten back the marks for their very first piece of homework.

"Stay there!" she said, and she sprinted up the stairs to the girls'

dormitories. Harry and Ron barely had time to exchange mystified looks before she was dashing back, an enormous old book in her arms.

“I never thought to look in here!” she whispered excitedly. “I got this out of the library weeks ago for a bit of light reading.”

“*Light?*” said Ron, but Hermione told him to be quiet until she’d looked something up, and started flicking frantically through the pages, muttering to herself.

At last she found what she was looking for.

“I knew it! I *knew* it!”

“Are we allowed to speak yet?” said Ron grumpily. Hermione ignored him.

“Nicolas Flamel,” she whispered dramatically, “is the *only known maker of the Sorcerer’s Stone!*”

This didn’t have quite the effect she’d expected.

“The what?” said Harry and Ron.

“Oh, *honestly*, don’t you two read? Look — read that, there.”

She pushed the book toward them, and Harry and Ron read:

The ancient study of alchemy is concerned with making the Sorcerer’s Stone, a legendary substance with astonishing powers. The Stone will transform any metal into pure gold. It also produces the Elixir of Life, which will make the drinker immortal.

There have been many reports of the Sorcerer’s Stone over the centuries, but the only Stone currently in existence belongs to Mr. Nicolas Flamel, the noted alchemist and opera lover. Mr. Flamel, who celebrated

his six hundred and sixty-fifth birthday last year, enjoys a quiet life in Devon with his wife, Perenelle (six hundred and fifty-eight).

“See?” said Hermione, when Harry and Ron had finished. “The dog must be guarding Flamel’s Sorcerer’s Stone! I bet he asked Dumbledore to keep it safe for him, because they’re friends and he knew someone was after it, that’s why he wanted the Stone moved out of Gringotts!”

“A stone that makes gold and stops you from ever dying!” said Harry. “No wonder Snape’s after it! *Anyone* would want it.”

“And no wonder we couldn’t find Flamel in that *Study of Recent Developments in Wizardry*,” said Ron. “He’s not exactly recent if he’s six hundred and sixty-five, is he?”

The next morning in Defense Against the Dark Arts, while copying down different ways of treating werewolf bites, Harry and Ron were still discussing what they’d do with a Sorcerer’s Stone if they had one. It wasn’t until Ron said he’d buy his own Quidditch team that Harry remembered about Snape and the coming match.

“I’m going to play,” he told Ron and Hermione. “If I don’t, all the Slytherins will think I’m just too scared to face Snape. I’ll show them . . . it’ll really wipe the smiles off their faces if we win.”

“Just as long as we’re not wiping you off the field,” said Hermione.

As the match drew nearer, however, Harry became more and more nervous, whatever he told Ron and Hermione. The rest of the team

wasn't too calm, either. The idea of overtaking Slytherin in the House Championship was wonderful, no one had done it for seven years, but would they be allowed to, with such a biased referee?

Harry didn't know whether he was imagining it or not, but he seemed to keep running into Snape wherever he went. At times, he even wondered whether Snape was following him, trying to catch him on his own. Potions lessons were turning into a sort of weekly torture, Snape was so horrible to Harry. Could Snape possibly know they'd found out about the Sorcerer's Stone? Harry didn't see how he could — yet he sometimes had the horrible feeling that Snape could read minds.

Harry knew, when they wished him good luck outside the locker rooms the next afternoon, that Ron and Hermione were wondering whether they'd ever see him alive again. This wasn't what you'd call comforting. Harry hardly heard a word of Wood's pep talk as he pulled on his Quidditch robes and picked up his Nimbus Two Thousand.

Ron and Hermione, meanwhile, had found a place in the stands next to Neville, who couldn't understand why they looked so grim and worried, or why they had both brought their wands to the match. Little did Harry know that Ron and Hermione had been secretly practicing the Leg-Locker Curse. They'd gotten the idea from Malfoy using it on Neville, and were ready to use it on Snape if he showed any sign of wanting to hurt Harry.

"Now, don't forget, it's *Locomotor Mortis*," Hermione muttered as Ron slipped his wand up his sleeve.

"I *know*," Ron snapped. "Don't nag."

Back in the locker room, Wood had taken Harry aside.

“Don’t want to pressure you, Potter, but if we ever need an early capture of the Snitch it’s now. Finish the game before Snape can favor Hufflepuff too much.”

“The whole school’s out there!” said Fred Weasley, peering out of the door. “Even — blimey — Dumbledore’s come to watch!”

Harry’s heart did a somersault.

“*Dumbledore?*” he said, dashing to the door to make sure. Fred was right. There was no mistaking that silver beard.

Harry could have laughed out loud with relief. He was safe. There was simply no way that Snape would dare to try to hurt him if Dumbledore was watching.

Perhaps that was why Snape was looking so angry as the teams marched onto the field, something that Ron noticed, too.

“I’ve never seen Snape look so mean,” he told Hermione. “Look — they’re off. Ouch!”

Someone had poked Ron in the back of the head. It was Malfoy.

“Oh, sorry, Weasley, didn’t see you there.”

Malfoy grinned broadly at Crabbe and Goyle.

“Wonder how long Potter’s going to stay on his broom this time? Anyone want a bet? What about you, Weasley?”

Ron didn’t answer; Snape had just awarded Hufflepuff a penalty because George Weasley had hit a Bludger at him. Hermione, who had all her fingers crossed in her lap, was squinting fixedly at Harry, who was circling the game like a hawk, looking for the Snitch.

“You know how I think they choose people for the Gryffindor team?” said Malfoy loudly a few minutes later, as Snape awarded

Hufflepuff another penalty for no reason at all. “It’s people they feel sorry for. See, there’s Potter, who’s got no parents, then there’s the Weasleys, who’ve got no money — you should be on the team, Longbottom, you’ve got no brains.”

Neville went bright red but turned in his seat to face Malfoy.

“I’m worth twelve of you, Malfoy,” he stammered.

Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle howled with laughter, but Ron, still not daring to take his eyes from the game, said, “You tell him, Neville.”

“Longbottom, if brains were gold you’d be poorer than Weasley, and that’s saying something.”

Ron’s nerves were already stretched to the breaking point with anxiety about Harry.

“I’m warning you, Malfoy — one more word —”

“Ron!” said Hermione suddenly, “Harry — !”

“What? Where?”

Harry had suddenly gone into a spectacular dive, which drew gasps and cheers from the crowd. Hermione stood up, her crossed fingers in her mouth, as Harry streaked toward the ground like a bullet.

“You’re in luck, Weasley, Potter’s obviously spotted some money on the ground!” said Malfoy.

Ron snapped. Before Malfoy knew what was happening, Ron was on top of him, wrestling him to the ground. Neville hesitated, then clambered over the back of his seat to help.

“Come on, Harry!” Hermione screamed, leaping onto her seat to watch as Harry sped straight at Snape — she didn’t even notice Malfoy and Ron rolling around under her seat, or the scuffles and

yelps coming from the whirl of fists that was Neville, Crabbe, and Goyle.

Up in the air, Snape turned on his broomstick just in time to see something scarlet shoot past him, missing him by inches — the next second, Harry had pulled out of the dive, his arm raised in triumph, the Snitch clasped in his hand.

The stands erupted; it had to be a record, no one could ever remember the Snitch being caught so quickly.

“Ron! Ron! Where are you? The game’s over! Harry’s won! We’ve won! Gryffindor is in the lead!” shrieked Hermione, dancing up and down on her seat and hugging Parvati Patil in the row in front.

Harry jumped off his broom, a foot from the ground. He couldn’t believe it. He’d done it — the game was over; it had barely lasted five minutes. As Gryffindors came spilling onto the field, he saw Snape land nearby, white-faced and tight-lipped — then Harry felt a hand on his shoulder and looked up into Dumbledore’s smiling face.

“Well done,” said Dumbledore quietly, so that only Harry could hear. “Nice to see you haven’t been brooding about that mirror . . . been keeping busy . . . excellent . . .”

Snape spat bitterly on the ground.

Harry left the locker room alone some time later, to take his Nimbus Two Thousand back to the broomshed. He couldn’t ever remember feeling happier. He’d really done something to be proud of now — no one could say he was just a famous name any more. The evening air had never smelled so sweet. He walked over the damp grass, reliving the last hour in his head, which was a happy blur: Gryffindors running to lift him onto their shoulders; Ron and

Hermione in the distance, jumping up and down, Ron cheering through a heavy nosebleed.

Harry had reached the shed. He leaned against the wooden door and looked up at Hogwarts, with its windows glowing red in the setting sun. Gryffindor in the lead. He'd done it, he'd shown Snape. . . .

And speaking of Snape . . .

A hooded figure came swiftly down the front steps of the castle. Clearly not wanting to be seen, it walked as fast as possible toward the forbidden forest. Harry's victory faded from his mind as he watched. He recognized the figure's prowling walk. Snape, sneaking into the forest while everyone else was at dinner — what was going on?

Harry jumped back on his Nimbus Two Thousand and took off. Gliding silently over the castle he saw Snape enter the forest at a run. He followed.

The trees were so thick he couldn't see where Snape had gone. He flew in circles, lower and lower, brushing the top branches of trees until he heard voices. He glided toward them and landed noiselessly in a towering beech tree.

He climbed carefully along one of the branches, holding tight to his broomstick, trying to see through the leaves.

Below, in a shadowy clearing, stood Snape, but he wasn't alone. Quirrell was there, too. Harry couldn't make out the look on his face, but he was stuttering worse than ever. Harry strained to catch what they were saying.

“ . . . d-don't know why you wanted t-t-to meet here of all p-places,

Severus . . .”

“Oh, I thought we’d keep this private,” said Snape, his voice icy. “Students aren’t supposed to know about the Sorcerer’s Stone, after all.”

Harry leaned forward. Quirrell was mumbling something. Snape interrupted him.

“Have you found out how to get past that beast of Hagrid’s yet?”

“B-b-but Severus, I —”

“You don’t want me as your enemy, Quirrell,” said Snape, taking a step toward him.

“I-I don’t know what you —”

“You know perfectly well what I mean.”

An owl hooted loudly, and Harry nearly fell out of the tree. He steadied himself in time to hear Snape say, “— your little bit of hocus-pocus. I’m waiting.”

“B-but I d-d-don’t —”

“Very well,” Snape cut in. “We’ll have another little chat soon, when you’ve had time to think things over and decided where your loyalties lie.”

He threw his cloak over his head and strode out of the clearing. It was almost dark now, but Harry could see Quirrell, standing quite still as though he was petrified.

“Harry, where have you *been*?” Hermione squeaked.

“We won! You won! We won!” shouted Ron, thumping Harry on the back. “And I gave Malfoy a black eye, and Neville tried to take on Crabbe and Goyle single-handed! He’s still out cold but Madam Pomfrey says he’ll be all right — talk about showing Slytherin!

Everyone's waiting for you in the common room, we're having a party, Fred and George stole some cakes and stuff from the kitchens."

"Never mind that now," said Harry breathlessly. "Let's find an empty room, you wait 'til you hear this. . . ."

He made sure Peeves wasn't inside before shutting the door behind them, then he told them what he'd seen and heard.

"So we were right, it *is* the Sorcerer's Stone, and Snape's trying to force Quirrell to help him get it. He asked if he knew how to get past Fluffy — and he said something about Quirrell's 'hocus-pocus' — I reckon there are other things guarding the stone apart from Fluffy, loads of enchantments, probably, and Quirrell would have done some anti-Dark Arts spell that Snape needs to break through —"

"So you mean the Stone's only safe as long as Quirrell stands up to Snape?" said Hermione in alarm.

"It'll be gone by next Tuesday," said Ron.

Nicolas Flamel

Dompeldorius het Harry oortuig om nie weer na die Spieël van Etreegeb te gaan soek nie en vir die res van die Kersvakansie lê die onsigbaarheidsmantel opgevou onder in sy trommel. Harry wens hy kan dit wat hy in die spieël gesien het, net so maklik vergeet, maar hy kan nie. Hy begin nagmerries kry. Oor en oor droom hy hoe sy ouers in 'n gloed van groen lig verdwyn terwyl 'n hoë stem aaklig kekkellag.

“Sien jy, Dompeldorius was reg, daardie spieël kan 'n mens mal maak,” sê Ron toe Harry hom van sy drome vertel.

Hermien, wat teruggekom het die dag voor die kwartaal begin het, kyk met ander oë daarna. Die gedagte aan Harry, drie nagte na mekaar in die gange, laat haar koud word (“As Fillis jou gevang het!”), maar sy is ook bitter teleurgesteld dat hy nie ten minste kon uitvind wie Nicolas Flamel is nie.

Hulle het al so te sê moed opgegee dat hulle Flamel ooit in 'n biblioteekboek sal vind, hoewel Harry nog steeds oortuig is dat hy die naam al iewers gesien het. Toe die kwartaal begin, blaai hulle maar weer deur die boeke vir ten minste tien minute van elke pouse. Harry het nog minder tyd as die ander twee, want die Kwiddiek-oefeninge het weer begin.

Wood laat sy span nog harder as tevore werk. Selfs die nimmereindigende reën wat na die sneeu kom, demp nie sy gees nie. Die Weasleys kla dat Wood fanaties word, maar Harry is aan Wood se kant. As hulle die volgende wedstryd teen Hoesenproes wen, sal hulle, vir die eerste keer in sewe jaar, bo Slibberin kom met die huiskampioenskap. Behalwe dat hy graag wil wen, het Harry ook minder nagmerries wanneer hy moeg geoefen is.

Op 'n dag, na 'n besondere nat en modderige oefensessie, gee Wood vir sy span 'n brokkie slegte nuus. Hy het hom so pas bloedig vererg vir die Weasleys, wat die hele tyd op mekaar afduik en maak of hulle van hul besems afval.

“Sal julle twee nou ophou om so kinderagtig te wees!” skree hy. “Dis hierdie soort ding wat sal maak dat ons die wedstryd verloor! Snerp is skeidsregter en hy sal enige verskoning gebruik om punte by Griffindor af te trek!”

Hierdie keer val George Weasley regtig van sy besem af.

“Snerp is skeidsregter?” stotter hy deur ’n mond vol modder. “Wanneer het hy al ooit vir ’n Kwiddiek-wedstryd geblaas? Hy gaan mos nie regverdig wees as ons dalk vir Slibberin verbysteeek nie!”

Die res van die span stryk langs George neer om ook te kla.

“Dis nie my skuld nie,” sê Wood. “Ons moet net seker maak dat ons ’n skoon wedstryd speel, sodat Snerp nie ’n verskoning het om op ons te pik nie.”

Dis makliker gesê as gedaan, dink Harry, maar hy het nog ’n rede hoekom hy nie vir Snerp naby hom wil hê as hy Kwiddiek speel nie . . .

Na die oefening bly die res van die span agter om soos gewoonlik ’n bietjie met mekaar te praat, maar Harry gaan reguit na die Griffindor-geselskamer waar Ron en Hermien sit en skaak speel. Skaak is die enigste ding wat Hermien ooit verloor, iets wat Ron en Harry reken haar die wêreld se goed doen.

“Moenie nou met my praat nie,” sê Ron toe Harry oorkant hom gaan sit. “Ek moet –” Hy vang Harry se gesig. “Wat makeer jou? Jy lyk verskriklik.”

Toe Harry hulle vertel van Snerp se skielike, sinistere besluit om ’n Kwiddiek-skeidsregter te wees, praat hy so sag dat niemand anders hom kan hoor nie.

“Moenie speel nie,” sê Hermien dadelik.

“Sê jy’s siek,” sê Ron.

“Maak of jy jou been gebreek het,” stel Hermien voor.

“Breek regtig jou been,” sê Ron.

“Ek kan nie,” sê Harry. “Daar’s nie ’n reserwe vir ’n Soeker nie. As ek uitdraai, kan Griffindor nie speel nie.”

Op daardie oomblik tuimel Neville die geselskamer binne. Hoe hy dit reggekry het om deur die portretopening te klim, weet nugter, want sy bene sit vas aan mekaar in wat hulle dadelik herken as die Beenklampvloek. Hy moet die hele ent pad na die Griffindor-toring soos ’n haas gespring het.

Almal rol van die lag, behalwe Hermien wat opvlieg en die teenvloek uitspreek. Neville se bene spring dadelik los en hy kom bewend regop.

“Wat het gebeur?” vra Hermien en neem hom om by Harry en Ron te gaan sit.

“Malfoy,” sê Neville senuagtig. “Ek het hom buite die biblioteek raakgeloop. Hy’t gesê hy soek iemand om op te oefen.”

“Gaan na professor McGonagall!” dring Hermien by Neville aan. “Gee hom aan!”

Neville skud sy kop.

“Ek soek nie nog meer moeilikheid nie,” mompel hy.

“Jy moet jou man staan, Neville!” sê Ron. “Hy’s gewoond daaraan om

oor mense te loop, maar dis nie nodig om voor hom te gaan lê en dit makliker te maak nie.”

“Dis nie nodig om my te vertel dat ek nie dapper genoeg is om in Griffindor te wees nie, Malfoy het dit klaar gedoen,” sê Neville.

Harry voel in sy kleed se sakke en haal ’n Sjokoladepadda uit, die laaste een uit die doos wat Hermien hom vir Kersfees gegee het. Hy gee dit aan Neville, wat lyk of hy wil huil.

“Jy is twaalf van Malfoy se soort werd,” sê Harry. “Die Sorteelhoed het jou vir Griffindor gekies, nie waar nie? En waar is Malfoy? In stinkende Slibberin.”

Neville maak die padda oop. Sy mond trek skeef in ’n flou glimlaggie.

“Dankie, Harry . . . ek dink ek gaan slaap . . . Wil jy die kaartjie hê, jy maak hulle mos bymekaar, nê?”

Toe Neville wegstap, kyk Harry na die Beroemde Towenaarskaartjie.

“Al weer Dompeldorius,” sê hy. “Hy was die eerste een wat ek –”

Hy snak na asem. Hy staar na die agterkant van die kaartjie. Toe kyk hy na Ron en Hermien.

“*Ek het hom!*” fluister hy. “Ek het vir Flamel gevind! Ek het mos gesê ek het die naam al iewers gelees, dit was op die trein op pad hierheen – luister: ’Professor Dompeldorius is veral bekend vir sy oorwinning in 1945 oor die donker towenaar, Grindelwald, vir die ontdekking van die twaalf gebruike van drakebloed en vir sy werk in die alchemie tesame met sy medewerker, Nicolas Flamel!’”

Hermien spring op. Sy het laas so opgewonde gelyk toe hulle hul punte vir hul eerste taak teruggekry het.

“Bly net daar!” sê sy en nael die trappe op na die meisies se slaapsaal. Harry en Ron het skaars kans om verward na mekaar te staar, of sy is terug met ’n enorme ou boek in haar arms.

“Ek het nooit daaraan gedink om hierin te kyk nie!” fluister sy opgewonde. “Ek het dit ’n paar weke gelede uitgeneem om iets ligs te hê om te lees.”

“Lig?” sê Ron, maar Hermien sê hy moet sy mond hou, want sy soek iets. Sy blaai verwoed deur die boek terwyl sy binnensmonds mompel.

Uiteindelik het sy wat sy soek.

“Ek het geweet! Ek het geweet!”

“Mag ons nou maar praat?” vra Ron grimmig. Hermien ignoreer hom.

“Nicolas Flamel,” fluister sy dramaties, “is die enigste lewende persoon wat die *Towenaar se Steen* kan vervaardig!”

Haar woorde het glad nie die uitwerking wat sy verwag het nie.

“Die wat?” sê Harry en Ron.

“Ag nee, *regtig*, lees julle twee dan nooit nie? Kyk – lees hier.”

Sy stoot die boek in hul rigting en Harry en Ron lees:

Die eeue oue studie van die alchemie is gemoeid met die vervaardiging van die Towenaar se Steen, 'n legendariese produk met verstommende magte. Die steen beskik oor die vermoë om enige metaal in suiwer goud te verander. Dit produseer ook die Elikser van die Lewe, 'n vloeistof wat diegene wat dit drink, onsterflik maak. Oor die eeue het geskiedskrywers gereeld melding gemaak van hierdie steen, maar die enigste Steen wat tans bestaan, is in besit van mnr. Nicolas Flamel, beroemde alchemus en liefhebber van operas. Mnr. Flamel, wat verlede jaar sy seshonderd-vyf-en-sestigste verjaardag gevier het, lei 'n stil lewe in Devon met sy vrou, Perenelle, wat seshonderd-agt-en-vyftig jaar oud is.

“Sien,” sê Hermien toe Harry en Ron klaar gelees het. “Daardie hond moet Flamel se Towenaarsteen oppas! Ek wed hy’t vir Dompeldorius gevra om dit veilig te bewaar omdat hulle vriende is en omdat hy weet dat iemand dit wil hê. Dis hoekom hulle die Steen by Edलगolt gaan verwyder het.”

“'n Klip wat goud maak en wat maak dat jy nooit doodgaan nie!” sê Harry. “G'n wonder Snerp wil dit hê nie! *Almal* sal dit wil hê.”

“En g'n wonder ons kon Flamel se naam nie in 'n *Studie van die Mees Onlangse Ontwikkelings in die Towerkuns* vind nie,” sê Ron. “Hy’s nie juis ’onlangs’ nie, is hy? Nie as hy seshonderd-vyf-en-sestig is nie.”

Die volgende dag in Verdediging teen die Donker Kunste, terwyl hulle al die maniere neerskryf om weerwolftyplekke te behandel, praat Harry en Ron strykdeur oor wat hulle alles met 'n Towenaarsteen sal doen as hulle een het. Dis eers toe Ron sê hy sal sy eie Kwiddiek-span koop dat Harry van Snerp en die komende wedstryd onthou.

“Ek gaan speel,” sê hy vir Ron en Hermien. “As ek nie speel nie, sal al die Slibberins dink ek is bang vir Snerp. Ek sal hulle wys . . . as ons wen, sal dit hul glimlagte van hul gesigte af vee.”

“Solank jy net nie van die veld af gevee word nie,” sê Hermien.

Hoe nader die wedstryd egter kom, hoe meer op sy senuwees raak Harry, ten spyte van wat hy aan Ron en Hermien gesê het. Die res van die span is ook glad nie so danig kalm nie. Die gedagte dat hulle vir Slibberin kan verbysteek, is wonderlik, vir amper sewe jaar kon niemand dit regkry nie, maar sal dit ooit gebeur met so 'n partydige skeidsregter?

Harry weet nie of dit sy verbeelding is of nie, maar waar hy hom ook al draai, loop hy in Snerp vas. By tye wonder hy of Snerp hom volg, hom op sy eie probeer vang. Die klasse in Towerdrankies voel soos 'n weeklikse martelsessie, so gemeen is Snerp met Harry. Sou Snerp vermoed dat

hulle van die Towenaarsteen weet? Harry kan dit nie *regtig* glo nie – maar tog voel dit soms of Snerp 'n mens se gedagtes kan lees.

Toe Ron en Hermien hom die volgende middag buite die kleedkamers voorspoed toewens, weet Harry hulle wonder of hulle hom weer lewend gaan sien. Dis nie 'n aangename gedagte nie. Harry trek sy Kwiddiek-kleere aan, tel sy Nimbus Tweeduisend op en hoor skaars 'n woord van Wood se spanpraatjie.

Ron en Hermien het intussen 'n plek op die pawiljoen langs Neville gekry. Neville kan glad nie verstaan hoekom hulle so ernstig en bekommerd lyk nie, ook nie hoekom hulle hul towerstawwe saamgebring het nie. Wat Harry nie weet nie, is dat Ron en Hermien die Beenklamp-vloek in die geheim geoefen het. Hulle het die plan gekry toe Malfoy dit op Neville gebruik het, en hulle staan reg om dit op Snerp te gebruik as dit net sou lyk of hy iets aan Harry wil doen.

“Moenie vergeet nie, dis *Locomotor Mortis*,” mompel Hermien terwyl Ron sy towerstaf in sy mou steek.

“Ek weet,” snou Ron haar toe. “Moenie karring nie.”

Terug in die kleedkamer neem Wood vir Harry eenkant toe.

“Wil nie druk op jou plaas nie, Potter, maar vandag moet ons die Snip gou in die hande kry. Die wedstryd moet oor wees voor Snerp vir Hoesenproes te veel voortrek.”

“Die hele skool is hier!” sê Fred Weasley en loer om die deur. “Selfs – vadertjie – Dompeldorius is hier!”

Harry se hart slaan bollemakiesie.

“*Dompeldorius*?” sê hy en storm deur toe om seker te maak. Fred is reg. Die silwer baard is onmiskenbaar.

Harry voel of hy kan lag van verligting. Hy is veilig. Snerp sal niks probeer as Dompeldorius daar is nie.

Dalk is dit hoekom Snerp so omgekrap lyk toe die spanne op die veld loop, iets wat Ron ook oplet.

“Ek het Snerp nog nooit so gemeen sien lyk nie,” sê hy vir Hermien. “Kyk – daar gaan hulle. Outsji!”

Iemand het Ron teen sy agterkop gestamp. Dis Malfoy.

“O jammer, Weasley, het jou nie gesien nie.”

Malfoy glimlag breed vir Krabbe en Goliat.

“Wonder hoe lank Potter hierdie keer op sy besem gaan bly? Wil iemand wed? Wat van jou, Weasley?”

Ron antwoord nie; Snerp het so pas vir Hoesenproes 'n strafgooi gegee omdat George Weasley 'n Moker na hom toe geslaan het. Al Hermien se vingers lê gekruis op haar skoot. Sy staar stip na Harry wat soos 'n valk bo die spelers draai en die Snip soek.

“Jy weet seker hoe ek dink hulle Griffindor se spelers kies?” vra Mal-

foy 'n paar minute later hard toe Snerp, sonder enige rede, nog 'n strafgooi teen Griffindor gee. "Dis mense vir wie hulle jammer is. Vat vir Potter, hy't nie ouers nie, en die Weasleys, hulle't nie geld nie – jy behoort ook in die span te kom, Loggerenberg, jy't nie verstand nie."

Neville bloos dieprooi, maar hy draai om in sy sitplek en kyk Malfoy vierkant in die oë.

"Ek is twaalf van jou soort werd, Malfoy," stamel hy.

Malfoy, Krabbe en Goliat skree van die lag, maar Ron, wat sy oë nog steeds stip op die wedstryd hou, sê, "Sê hom, Neville, sê hom."

"Loggerenberg, al is jou brein ook van goud gemaak, sal jy nog steeds armer as Weasley wees en dit sê baie."

Ron se senuwees is tot breekpunt toe gespan van kommer oor Harry.

"Ek waarsku jou, Malfoy – nog een woord –"

"Ron!" sê Hermien skielik, "Harry – !"

"Wat? Waar?"

Harry het skielik 'n skouspelagtige duik uitgevoer wat die skare laat juig en na hul asem laat snak. Hermien vlieg op, haar gekruisde vingers in haar mond, terwyl Harry soos 'n koeël grond toe skiet.

"Jou geluk is in, Weasley, lyk my Potter het geld op die grond sien lê!" sê Malfoy.

Dis die laaste strooi. Voor Malfoy mooi weet wat hom tref, is Ron op hom en stoei hom grond toe. Neville huiwer 'n oomblik, toe klouter hy oor sy sitplek om te kom help.

"Kom, Harry!" skreeu Hermien en spring op haar sitplek om te sien hoe Harry op Snerp afpyl – sy merk nie eens hoe Malfoy en Ron onder haar sitplek rondrol nie, ook nie die geworstel en die krete en die warreling van vuiste wat Neville, Krabbe en Goliat is nie.

Hoog bo in die lug draai Snerp op sy besem, net betyds om te sien hoe iets in skarlakenrooi verby hom flits en hom net-net mis – die volgende oomblik lig Harry die besem se neus en hou hy sy arm triomfantlik omhoog, die Snip veilig in sy hand.

Die pawiljoen ontplof; dit moet 'n rekord wees, niemand kan onthou dat die Snip al ooit tevore so gou gevang is nie.

"Ron! Ron! Waar is jy? Die wedstryd is oor! Harry het gewen! Ons het gewen! Griffindor is voor!" gil Hermien en dans op en neer en omhels Parvati Patel wat voor haar sit.

Omtrent 'n voet bo die grond spring Harry van sy besem af. Hy kan dit glo nie. Hy het dit reggekry – die wedstryd is oor; dit het skaars vyf minute geduur. Toe die Griffindors op die veld hardloop, sien hy Snerp daar naby land, wit in die gesig en met stywe lippe – toe voel Harry 'n hand op sy skouer en hy kyk op in Dompeldorius se glimlaggende gesig.

"Wel gedaan," sê Dompeldorius saggies, sodat net Harry kan hoor.

“Dis goed om te sien dat jy nie oor daardie spieël tob nie . . . dat jy besig bly . . . uitstekend . . .”

Snerp spoeg vies op die grond.

’n Rukkie later stap Harry alleen uit die kleedkamer om sy Nimbus Tweeduisend na die besemskuur te neem. Hy het nog nooit gelukkiger gevoel as vandag nie. Hy het regtig iets gedoen om op trots te wees – nou kan niemand meer sê dat hy net ’n beroemde naam is nie. Die aandlug het nog nooit so soet geruik nie. Soos hy oor die klam gras stap, herleef hy die afgelope uur in sy kop. Dis ’n hemelse warboel van indrukke: Griffindors wat aangehardloop kom om hom op hul skouers te lig; Ron en Hermien wat eenkant op en af spring, Ron wat hom toejuig, bloedneus en al.

Harry is by die skuur. Hy leun teen die houtdeur en kyk hoe Hogwarts se vensters in die rooi aandskemering gloei. Griffindor is voor. En dit was hy, hy het vir Snerp gewys . . .

Praat van die duiwel . . .

’n Figuur, gebukkend onder ’n mantel, draf haastig met die kasteel se trap af. Dis duidelik dat die persoon nie gesien wil wees nie, want hy stap so vinnig moontlik in die rigting van die verbode woud. Die gloed van Harry se oorwinning vervaag met elke tree wat die persoon gee. Hy het die sluipende manier van stap dadelik herken. Snerp, op pad na die verbode woud terwyl almal eet – wat gaan aan?

Harry spring op sy Nimbus Tweeduisend en skop weg. Hy seil oor die kasteel en sien hoe Snerp die woud in draf. Hy sit hom agterna.

Die bome is so dig dat hy kwalik kan sien waar Snerp is. Hy vlieg in sirkels, laer en laer, hy skeer oor die boomtoppe tot hy stemme hoor. Hy gly nader en land geluidloos op die top van ’n reusebeukeboom.

Hy klouter versigtig langs een van die takke af, hy hou sy besem styf vas en probeer deur die blare loer.

Onder, in ’n skaduryke oop kol, staan Snerp, maar hy is nie alleen nie. Quirrell is ook daar. Harry kan nie die uitdrukking op sy gesig sien nie, maar hy stotter erger as ooit tevore. Harry spits sy ore om te probeer uitmaak wat hulle sê.

“. . . w-weet nie hoekom jy my h-h-hier van alle p-plekke wil s-s-sien nie, Severus . . .”

“O, ek het gedink dit moet tussen ons twee bly,” sê Snerp en sy stem is ysig. “Studente is immers nie veronderstel om van die Townaarsteen te weet nie.”

Harry leun verder vooroor. Quirrell mompel iets. Snerp val hom in die rede.

“Het jy al agtergekom hoe om verby daardie ondier van Hagrid te kom?”

“M-m-maar Severus, ek –”

“Wil jy my as ’n vyand hê, Quirrell?” vra Snerp en gee ’n tree vorentoe.

“E-ek w-weet nie w-wat jy –”

“Jy weet baie goed wat ek bedoel.”

’n Uil roep skielik hard en Harry val amper uit die boom uit. Hy herwin sy balans net betyds om Snerp te hoor sê, “– jou persoonlike stukkie hokus-pokus. Ek wag.”

“M-maar ek w-w-wil nie –”

“Goed dan,” val Snerp hom in die rede, “ons sal binnekort weer praat, wanneer jy tyd gehad het om dinge mooi te oordink en te besluit waar jou lojaliteit lê.”

Hy gooi sy mantel oor sy kop en stap met lang treë weg. Dis amper donker, maar Harry kan Quirrell nog sien staan, doodstil, asof hy lam van skrik is.

“Harry, waar was jy?” raas Hermien.

“Ons het gewen! Ons het gewen! Ons het gewen!” skreeu Ron en slaan Harry op die rug. “En ek het vir Malfoy ’n blouoog gegee en Neville het alleen teen Krabbe en Goliath baklei! Hy’s nog steeds flou, maar Madame Pomfrey sê hy sal regkom – praat van vir Slibberin wys! Almal wag vir jou daar in die geselskamer, ons vier fees, Fred en George het koek en goed uit die kombuis gesteel.”

“Los dit eers,” sê Harry uitasem. “Kom ons soek ’n leë kamer, wag net tot julle dit hoor. . . .”

Hy maak eers seker dat Nurks nie in die vertrek is nie, voor hy die deur agter hulle toemaak en hulle alles vertel wat hy gesien en gehoor het.

“Ons was dus reg, dit is die Towenaarsteen en Snerp probeer vir Quirrell dwing om hom te help om dit te kry. Hy’t gevra of Quirrell al weet hoe om verby Wollie te kom – en hy’t iets gesê van Quirrell se ‘hokus-pokus’ – daar is seker nog goed wat die steen oppas behalwe Wollie, waarskynlik allerhande towerdinge en Quirrell het seker ’n paar anti-Donker Kuns-towerspreuke uitgespreek wat Snerp moet breek en –”

“So jy sê die Steen is net veilig solank Quirrell teen Snerp kan uithou?” sê Hermien verskrik.

“Voor volgende Dinsdag is dit weg,” sê Ron.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN



NORBERT THE NORWEGIAN RIDGEBACK

Quirrell, however, must have been braver than they'd thought. In the weeks that followed he did seem to be getting paler and thinner, but it didn't look as though he'd cracked yet.

Every time they passed the third-floor corridor, Harry, Ron, and Hermione would press their ears to the door to check that Fluffy was still growling inside. Snape was sweeping about in his usual bad temper, which surely meant that the Stone was still safe. Whenever Harry passed Quirrell these days he gave him an encouraging sort of smile, and Ron had started telling people off for laughing at Quirrell's stutter.

Hermione, however, had more on her mind than the Sorcerer's Stone. She had started drawing up study schedules and color-coding all her notes. Harry and Ron wouldn't have minded, but she kept nagging them to do the same.

"Hermione, the exams are ages away."

"Ten weeks," Hermione snapped. "That's not ages, that's like a second to Nicolas Flamel."

"But we're not six hundred years old," Ron reminded her. "Anyway, what are you studying for, you already know it all."

"What am I studying for? Are you crazy? You realize we need to pass these exams to get into the second year? They're very important, I should have started studying a month ago, I don't know what's gotten into me. . . ."

Unfortunately, the teachers seemed to be thinking along the same

lines as Hermione. They piled so much homework on them that the Easter holidays weren't nearly as much fun as the Christmas ones. It was hard to relax with Hermione next to you reciting the twelve uses of dragon's blood or practicing wand movements. Moaning and yawning, Harry and Ron spent most of their free time in the library with her, trying to get through all their extra work.

"I'll never remember this," Ron burst out one afternoon, throwing down his quill and looking longingly out of the library window. It was the first really fine day they'd had in months. The sky was a clear, forget-me-not blue, and there was a feeling in the air of summer coming.

Harry, who was looking up "Dittany" in *One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi*, didn't look up until he heard Ron say, "Hagrid! What are you doing in the library?"

Hagrid shuffled into view, hiding something behind his back. He looked very out of place in his moleskin overcoat.

"Jus' lookin'," he said, in a shifty voice that got their interest at once. "An' what're you lot up ter?" He looked suddenly suspicious. "Yer not still lookin' fer Nicolas Flamel, are yeh?"

"Oh, we found out who he is ages ago," said Ron impressively. "*And* we know what that dog's guarding, it's a Sorcerer's St —"

"*Shhhh!*" Hagrid looked around quickly to see if anyone was listening. "Don' go shoutin' about it, what's the matter with yeh?"

"There are a few things we wanted to ask you, as a matter of fact," said Harry, "about what's guarding the Stone apart from Fluffy —"

"SHHHH!" said Hagrid again. "Listen — come an' see me later, I'm not promisin' I'll tell yeh anythin', mind, but don' go rabbitin'."

about it in here, students aren't s'posed to know. They'll think I've told yeh —"

"See you later, then," said Harry.

Hagrid shuffled off.

"What was he hiding behind his back?" said Hermione thoughtfully.

"Do you think it had anything to do with the Stone?"

"I'm going to see what section he was in," said Ron, who'd had enough of working. He came back a minute later with a pile of books in his arms and slammed them down on the table.

"*Dragons!*" he whispered. "Hagrid was looking up stuff about dragons! Look at these: *Dragon Species of Great Britain and Ireland; From Egg to Inferno, A Dragon Keeper's Guide.*"

"Hagrid's always wanted a dragon, he told me so the first time I ever met him," said Harry.

"But it's against our laws," said Ron. "Dragon breeding was outlawed by the Warlocks' Convention of 1709, everyone knows that. It's hard to stop Muggles from noticing us if we're keeping dragons in the back garden — anyway, you can't tame dragons, it's dangerous. You should see the burns Charlie's got off wild ones in Romania."

"But there aren't wild dragons in *Britain*?" said Harry.

"Of course there are," said Ron. "Common Welsh Green and Hebridean Blacks. The Ministry of Magic has a job hushing them up, I can tell you. Our kind have to keep putting spells on Muggles who've spotted them, to make them forget."

"So what on earth's Hagrid up to?" said Hermione.

When they knocked on the door of the gamekeeper's hut an hour later,

they were surprised to see that all the curtains were closed. Hagrid called “Who is it?” before he let them in, and then shut the door quickly behind them.

It was stifling hot inside. Even though it was such a warm day, there was a blazing fire in the grate. Hagrid made them tea and offered them stoat sandwiches, which they refused.

“So — yeh wanted to ask me somethin’?”

“Yes,” said Harry. There was no point beating around the bush. “We were wondering if you could tell us what’s guarding the Sorcerer’s Stone apart from Fluffy.”

Hagrid frowned at him.

“O’ course I can’t,” he said. “Number one, I don’ know meself. Number two, yeh know too much already, so I wouldn’ tell yeh if I could. That Stone’s here fer a good reason. It was almost stolen outta Gringotts — I s’ppose yeh’ve worked that out an’ all? Beats me how yeh even know abou’ Fluffy.”

“Oh, come on, Hagrid, you might not want to tell us, but you *do* know, you know everything that goes on round here,” said Hermione in a warm, flattering voice. Hagrid’s beard twitched and they could tell he was smiling. “We only wondered who had *done* the guarding, really.” Hermione went on. “We wondered who Dumbledore had trusted enough to help him, apart from you.”

Hagrid’s chest swelled at these last words. Harry and Ron beamed at Hermione.

“Well, I don’ s’pose it could hurt ter tell yeh that . . . let’s see . . . he borrowed Fluffy from me . . . then some o’ the teachers did enchantments . . . Professor Sprout — Professor Flitwick —

Professor McGonagall —” he ticked them off on his fingers, “Professor Quirrell — an’ Dumbledore himself did somethin’, o’ course. Hang on, I’ve forgotten someone. Oh yeah, Professor Snape.”

“*Snape?*”

“Yeah — yer not still on abou’ that, are yeh? Look, Snape helped *protect* the Stone, he’s not about ter steal it.”

Harry knew Ron and Hermione were thinking the same as he was. If Snape had been in on protecting the Stone, it must have been easy to find out how the other teachers had guarded it. He probably knew everything — except, it seemed, Quirrell’s spell and how to get past Fluffy.

“You’re the only one who knows how to get past Fluffy, aren’t you, Hagrid?” said Harry anxiously. “And you wouldn’t tell anyone, would you? Not even one of the teachers?”

“Not a soul knows except me an’ Dumbledore,” said Hagrid proudly.

“Well, that’s something,” Harry muttered to the others. “Hagrid, can we have a window open? I’m boiling.”

“Can’t, Harry, sorry,” said Hagrid. Harry noticed him glance at the fire. Harry looked at it, too.

“Hagrid — what’s *that*?”

But he already knew what it was. In the very heart of the fire, underneath the kettle, was a huge, black egg.

“Ah,” said Hagrid, fiddling nervously with his beard, “That’s — er . . .”

“Where did you get it, Hagrid?” said Ron, crouching over the fire to get a closer look at the egg. “It must’ve cost you a fortune.”

“Won it,” said Hagrid. “Las’ night. I was down in the village havin’ a few drinks an’ got into a game o’ cards with a stranger. Think he was quite glad ter get rid of it, ter be honest.”

“But what are you going to do with it when it’s hatched?” said Hermione.

“Well, I’ve bin doin’ some readin’,” said Hagrid, pulling a large book from under his pillow. “Got this outta the library — *Dragon Breeding for Pleasure and Profit* — it’s a bit outta date, o’ course, but it’s all in here. Keep the egg in the fire, ’cause their mothers breathe on ’em, see, an’ when it hatches, feed it on a bucket o’ brandy mixed with chicken blood every half hour. An’ see here — how ter recognize diff’rent eggs — what I got there’s a Norwegian Ridgeback. They’re rare, them.”

He looked very pleased with himself, but Hermione didn’t.

“Hagrid, you live in a *wooden house*,” she said.

But Hagrid wasn’t listening. He was humming merrily as he stoked the fire.

So now they had something else to worry about: what might happen to Hagrid if anyone found out he was hiding an illegal dragon in his hut.

“Wonder what it’s like to have a peaceful life,” Ron sighed, as evening after evening they struggled through all the extra homework they were getting. Hermione had now started making study schedules for Harry and Ron, too. It was driving them nuts.

Then, one breakfast time, Hedwig brought Harry another note from Hagrid. He had written only two words: *It’s hatching*.

Ron wanted to skip Herbology and go straight down to the hut.

Hermione wouldn't hear of it.

“Hermione, how many times in our lives are we going to see a dragon hatching?”

“We've got lessons, we'll get into trouble, and that's nothing to what Hagrid's going to be in when someone finds out what he's doing ____”

“Shut up!” Harry whispered.

Malfoy was only a few feet away and he had stopped dead to listen. How much had he heard? Harry didn't like the look on Malfoy's face at all.

Ron and Hermione argued all the way to Herbology and in the end, Hermione agreed to run down to Hagrid's with the other two during morning break. When the bell sounded from the castle at the end of their lesson, the three of them dropped their trowels at once and hurried through the grounds to the edge of the forest. Hagrid greeted them, looking flushed and excited.

“It's nearly out.” He ushered them inside.

The egg was lying on the table. There were deep cracks in it. Something was moving inside; a funny clicking noise was coming from it.

They all drew their chairs up to the table and watched with bated breath.

All at once there was a scraping noise and the egg split open. The baby dragon flopped onto the table. It wasn't exactly pretty; Harry thought it looked like a crumpled, black umbrella. Its spiny wings were huge compared to its skinny jet body, it had a long snout with wide nostrils, the stubs of horns and bulging, orange eyes.

It sneezed. A couple of sparks flew out of its snout.

“Isn’t he *beautiful*?” Hagrid murmured. He reached out a hand to stroke the dragon’s head. It snapped at his fingers, showing pointed fangs.

“Bless him, look, he knows his mummy!” said Hagrid.

“Hagrid,” said Hermione, “how fast do Norwegian Ridgebacks grow, exactly?”

Hagrid was about to answer when the color suddenly drained from his face — he leapt to his feet and ran to the window.

“What’s the matter?”

“Someone was lookin’ through the gap in the curtains — it’s a kid — he’s runnin’ back up ter the school.”

Harry bolted to the door and looked out. Even at a distance there was no mistaking him.

Malfoy had seen the dragon.

Something about the smile lurking on Malfoy’s face during the next week made Harry, Ron, and Hermione very nervous. They spent most of their free time in Hagrid’s darkened hut, trying to reason with him.

“Just let him go,” Harry urged. “Set him free.”

“I can’t,” said Hagrid. “He’s too little. He’d die.”

They looked at the dragon. It had grown three times in length in just a week. Smoke kept furling out of its nostrils. Hagrid hadn’t been doing his gamekeeping duties because the dragon was keeping him so busy. There were empty brandy bottles and chicken feathers all over the floor.

“I’ve decided to call him Norbert,” said Hagrid, looking at the dragon with misty eyes. “He really knows me now, watch. Norbert!

Norbert! Where's Mummy?"

"He's lost his marbles," Ron muttered in Harry's ear.

"Hagrid," said Harry loudly, "give it two weeks and Norbert's going to be as long as your house. Malfoy could go to Dumbledore at any moment."

Hagrid bit his lip.

"I — I know I can't keep him forever, but I can't jus' dump him, I can't."

Harry suddenly turned to Ron.

"Charlie," he said.

"You're losing it, too," said Ron. "I'm Ron, remember?"

"No — Charlie — your brother, Charlie. In Romania. Studying dragons. We could send Norbert to him. Charlie can take care of him and then put him back in the wild!"

"Brilliant!" said Ron. "How about it, Hagrid?"

And in the end, Hagrid agreed that they could send an owl to Charlie to ask him.

The following week dragged by. Wednesday night found Hermione and Harry sitting alone in the common room, long after everyone else had gone to bed. The clock on the wall had just chimed midnight when the portrait hole burst open. Ron appeared out of nowhere as he pulled off Harry's Invisibility Cloak. He had been down at Hagrid's hut, helping him feed Norbert, who was now eating dead rats by the crate.

"It bit me!" he said, showing them his hand, which was wrapped in a bloody handkerchief. "I'm not going to be able to hold a quill for a week. I tell you, that dragon's the most horrible animal I've ever met,

but the way Hagrid goes on about it, you'd think it was a fluffy little bunny rabbit. When it bit me he told me off for frightening it. And when I left, he was singing it a lullaby."

There was a tap on the dark window.

"It's Hedwig!" said Harry, hurrying to let her in. "She'll have Charlie's answer!"

The three of them put their heads together to read the note.

Dear Ron,

How are you? Thanks for the letter — I'd be glad to take the Norwegian Ridgeback, but it won't be easy getting him here. I think the best thing will be to send him over with some friends of mine who are coming to visit me next week. Trouble is, they mustn't be seen carrying an illegal dragon.

Could you get the Ridgeback up the tallest tower at midnight on Saturday? They can meet you there and take him away while it's still dark.

Send me an answer as soon as possible.

Love,

Charlie

They looked at one another.

"We've got the Invisibility Cloak," said Harry. "It shouldn't be too difficult — I think the cloak's big enough to cover two of us and Norbert."

It was a mark of how bad the last week had been that the other two

agreed with him. Anything to get rid of Norbert — and Malfoy.

There was a hitch. By the next morning, Ron's bitten hand had swollen to twice its usual size. He didn't know whether it was safe to go to Madam Pomfrey — would she recognize a dragon bite? By the afternoon, though, he had no choice. The cut had turned a nasty shade of green. It looked as if Norbert's fangs were poisonous.

Harry and Hermione rushed up to the hospital wing at the end of the day to find Ron in a terrible state in bed.

"It's not just my hand," he whispered, "although that feels like it's about to fall off. Malfoy told Madam Pomfrey he wanted to borrow one of my books so he could come and have a good laugh at me. He kept threatening to tell her what really bit me — I've told her it was a dog, but I don't think she believes me — I shouldn't have hit him at the Quidditch match, that's why he's doing this."

Harry and Hermione tried to calm Ron down.

"It'll all be over at midnight on Saturday," said Hermione, but this didn't soothe Ron at all. On the contrary, he sat bolt upright and broke into a sweat.

"Midnight on Saturday!" he said in a hoarse voice. "Oh no — oh no — I've just remembered — Charlie's letter was in that book Malfoy took, he's going to know we're getting rid of Norbert."

Harry and Hermione didn't get a chance to answer. Madam Pomfrey came over at that moment and made them leave, saying Ron needed sleep.

"It's too late to change the plan now," Harry told Hermione. "We haven't got time to send Charlie another owl, and this could be our

only chance to get rid of Norbert. We'll have to risk it. And we *have* got the Invisibility Cloak, Malfoy doesn't know about that."

They found Fang the boarhound sitting outside with a bandaged tail when they went to tell Hagrid, who opened a window to talk to them.

"I won't let you in," he puffed. "Norbert's at a tricky stage — nothin' I can't handle."

When they told him about Charlie's letter, his eyes filled with tears, although that might have been because Norbert had just bitten him on the leg.

"Aargh! It's all right, he only got my boot — jus' playin' — he's only a baby, after all."

The baby banged its tail on the wall, making the windows rattle. Harry and Hermione walked back to the castle feeling Saturday couldn't come quickly enough.

They would have felt sorry for Hagrid when the time came for him to say good-bye to Norbert if they hadn't been so worried about what they had to do. It was a very dark, cloudy night, and they were a bit late arriving at Hagrid's hut because they'd had to wait for Peeves to get out of their way in the entrance hall, where he'd been playing tennis against the wall.

Hagrid had Norbert packed and ready in a large crate.

"He's got lots o' rats an' some brandy fer the journey," said Hagrid in a muffled voice. "An' I've packed his teddy bear in case he gets lonely."

From inside the crate came ripping noises that sounded to Harry as though the teddy was having his head torn off.

"Bye-bye, Norbert!" Hagrid sobbed, as Harry and Hermione

covered the crate with the Invisibility Cloak and stepped underneath it themselves. “Mummy will never forget you!”

How they managed to get the crate back up to the castle, they never knew. Midnight ticked nearer as they heaved Norbert up the marble staircase in the entrance hall and along the dark corridors. Up another staircase, then another — even one of Harry’s shortcuts didn’t make the work much easier.

“Nearly there!” Harry panted as they reached the corridor beneath the tallest tower.

Then a sudden movement ahead of them made them almost drop the crate. Forgetting that they were already invisible, they shrank into the shadows, staring at the dark outlines of two people grappling with each other ten feet away. A lamp flared.

Professor McGonagall, in a tartan bathrobe and a hair net, had Malfoy by the ear.

“Detention!” she shouted. “And twenty points from Slytherin! Wandering around in the middle of the night, how *dare* you —”

“You don’t understand, Professor. Harry Potter’s coming — he’s got a dragon!”

“What utter rubbish! How dare you tell such lies! Come on — I shall see Professor Snape about you, Malfoy!”

The steep spiral staircase up to the top of the tower seemed the easiest thing in the world after that. Not until they’d stepped out into the cold night air did they throw off the Cloak, glad to be able to breathe properly again. Hermione did a sort of jig.

“Malfoy’s got detention! I could sing!”

“Don’t,” Harry advised her.

Chuckling about Malfoy, they waited, Norbert thrashing about in his crate. About ten minutes later, four broomsticks came swooping down out of the darkness.

Charlie's friends were a cheery lot. They showed Harry and Hermione the harness they'd rigged up, so they could suspend Norbert between them. They all helped buckle Norbert safely into it and then Harry and Hermione shook hands with the others and thanked them very much.

At last, Norbert was going . . . going . . . *gone*.

They slipped back down the spiral staircase, their hearts as light as their hands, now that Norbert was off them. No more dragon — Malfoy in detention — what could spoil their happiness?

The answer to that was waiting at the foot of the stairs. As they stepped into the corridor, Filch's face loomed suddenly out of the darkness.

"Well, well, well," he whispered, "we *are* in trouble."

They'd left the Invisibility Cloak on top of the tower.

Norbert die Noorweegse Rifrug

Quirrell moet egter dapperder wees as wat hulle gedink het. Oor die volgende paar weke word hy wel bleker en maerder, maar dit lyk tog of hy nie sommer gaan ingee nie.

Elke keer dat hulle verby die verbode gang op die derde verdieping stap, druk Harry, Ron en Hermien hul ore teen die deur om te hoor of Wollie steeds daar binne staan en grom. Snerp sluip rond met sy gewone suur gesig, wat moet beteken dat die Steen nog veilig is. Elke keer dat Harry verby Quirrell stap, gee hy hom 'n bemoedigende soort glimlaggie en Ron het begin om mense sleg te sê as hulle met Quirrell se hakkelry spot.

Hermien het meer as die Towenaarsteen om haar oor te bekommer. Sy is besig om 'n hersieningsrooster op te stel en om haar aantekeninge volgens 'n kleurkode te rangskik. Dit sou Harry en Ron glad nie gepla het nie, maar sy torring die hele tyd aan hulle om dit ook te doen.

“Hermien, dis nog eeue voor die eksamen.”

“Tien weke,” kap Hermien terug. “Dis nie eeue nie, vir Nicolas Flamel is dit 'n sekonde.”

“Maar ons is nie seshonderd jaar oud nie,” herinner Ron haar. “En hoekom wil jy nogal hersien, jy ken alles.”

“Hoekom wil ek hersien? Is jy mal? Besef jy ons moet deurkom om na die tweede jaar te kan gaan? Dis baie belangrik, ek moes al 'n maand gelede begin leer het, ek weet nie wat dit met my is nie . . .”

Ongelukkig dink al die onderwysers soos Hermien. Hulle stapel soveel huiswerk op die studente dat die Paasvakansie nie naastenby soveel pret as die Kersvakansie is nie. Dis moeilik om te ontspan as Hermien gedurig langs jou die twaalf gebruike van drakebloed opsê of bewegings met haar towerstaf oefen. Op die ou end sit Harry en Ron, al gapend en kreunend, die meeste van hul vrye tyd saam met haar in die biblioteek en sukkel om deur al die ekstra werk te kom.

“Ek sal nooit al die goed onthou nie,” bars Ron een middag uit, gooi sy veerpen neer en staar verlangend deur die biblioteek se venster. Dis die eerste lekker dag in maande. Die lug is so blou soos vergeet-mynietjies en daar is 'n gevoel in die lug dat die somer aan die kom is.

Harry, wat besig is om “essekruid” te soek in *Eenhonderd Magiese Pad-dastoele en -Kruie*, kyk eers op toe hy Ron hoor sê, “Hagrid! Wat maak jy in die biblioteek?”

Hagrid kom vorentoe, hy steek iets agter sy rug weg. Sy molveloorjas pas nie juis by die biblioteek nie.

“Kyk maar net,” sê hy, so onskuldig dat hulle dadelik regop sit. “En wat maak julle drie hier?” Skielik lyk hy agterdogtig. “Julle soek nog steeds vir Nicolas Flamel, nie waar nie?”

“O, ons weet lankal wie hy is,” sê Ron uit die hoogte. “En ons weet wat daardie hond moet oppas, dis ’n Towenaa –”

“Sjjjj!” Hagrid kyk vinnig om hom rond om seker te maak dat niemand kan hoor nie. “Moenie so hard praat nie, wat gaan aan met jou?”

“Daar’s ’n paar goed wat ons vir jou wil vra,” sê Harry, “soos wat daar nog alles is wat help om die Steen veilig te hou, dis nou behalwe Wol –”

“SJJJJ!” sê Hagrid weer. “Luister – kom sien my later, ek belowe niks nie, maar moenie julle snaters hier staan en rek nie, die studente mag nie weet nie. Hulle sal dink ek het vir julle gesê –”

“Sien jou dan later,” sê Harry.

Hagrid skuifel weg.

“Wat steek hy so agter sy rug weg?” sê Hermien ingedagte.

“Dink jy dit het iets met die Steen te doen?”

“Ek gaan kyk in watter afdeling hy was,” sê Ron, wat vir eers genoeg gehad het van leer. ’n Rukkie later is hy terug met ’n stapel boeke in sy arms. Hy plak hulle op die tafel neer.

“*Drake!*” fluister hy. “Hagrid het opgelees oor drake! Kyk hier: *Drake: Spesies in Groot Brittanje en Ierland; Van Eier tot Inferno*, ’n Handboek vir Telers.”

“Hagrid wou nog altyd ’n draak hê, hy’t so gesê toe ek hom die eerste keer ontmoet het,” sê Harry.

“Maar dis teen ons wette,” sê Ron. “Die teel van drake word verbied deur die Warlock Konvensie van 1709, almal weet dit. Dis moeilik om die Moggels te bluf as ons drake in ons agterplase aanhou – in elk geval, ’n mens kan nie drake mak maak nie, dis gevaarlik. Jy moet sien hoe Charlie gebrand was van die wilde drake daar in Roemenië.”

“Maar is daar dan wilde drake in Brittanje?” vra Harry.

“Natuurlik is daar,” sê Ron. “Die gewone Walliese Groene en die Hebridiese Swarte. Die Ministerie van Towerkuns sukkel omtrent om dit stil te hou, ek sê jou. Hulle moet gedurig towerspreuke uitspreek oor die Moggels wat die goed gesien het, sodat hulle daarvan kan vergeet.”

“So waarmee op aarde is Hagrid dan besig?” sê Hermien.

Toe hulle ’n uur later aan die boswagter se deur klop, is hulle verbaas om te sien dat die gordyne toegetrek is. Hagrid roep, “Wie’s daar?” voor hy

hulle laat inkom en hy sluit die deur weer dadelik agter hulle toe.

Dit is kokend warm in die hut. Hoewel dit 'n warm dag is, brand daar 'n groot vuur in die kaggel. Hagrid maak tee en bied vir hulle weseltoebroodjies aan, maar hulle sê nee dankie. "So – julle wil iets vra?"

"Ja," sê Harry. Dit help tog nie om doekies om te draai nie. "Ons wil weet of jy vir ons kan sê wat daar nog alles is wat die Towenaarsteen veilig hou, behalwe natuurlik Wollie."

Hagrid frons.

"Tuurlik kan ek nie sê nie," antwoord hy. "Nommer een, ek weet self nie. Nommer twee, julle weet reeds te veel, so ek sal nie sê nie al kan ek ook. Daardie Steen is daar vir 'n goeie rede. Dis amper uit Edulgolt gesteel – julle het dit seker al uitgewerk? Wens ek kan uitvind hoe julle van Wollie weet."

"Ag, toe, Hagrid, jy mag dalk nie lus wees om ons te vertel nie, maar jy weet, jy weet *alles* wat hier aangaan," sê Hermien in 'n warm, vleierende stem. Hagrid se baard bewe en hulle kan sien dat hy glimlag. "Ons het maar net gewonder wie almal *help* om die Steen op te pas, sien," gaan Hermien voort, "wie Dompeldorius genoeg vertrou om hom te help, dis nou behalwe jy, natuurlik."

Hagrid se borskas swel toe hy hierdie woorde hoor. Harry en Ron glimlag breed vir Hermien.

"Wel, dit kan seker nie kwaad doen om julle te vertel nie . . . laa'k sien . . . hy't Wollie by my kom leen . . . toe't party van die onderwysers die toorwerk gedoen . . . professor Spruit – professor Flickerpitt – professor McGonagall –" hy tik hulle af op sy vingers, "professor Quirrell – en Dompeldorius het self ook iets gedoen, natuurlik. Wa'wa'wag, amper vergeet ek, professor Snerp."

"Snerp?"

"Ja – julle gaan nie nog steeds aan oor hom nie, hè? Luister, Snerp het gehelp om die Steen te *beskerm*, hy's nie van plan om dit te steel nie."

Harry weet Ron en Hermien dink nes hy. As Snerp weet hoe die Steen beskerm word, is dit mos die maklikste ding om uit te vind wat die ander onderwysers gedoen het. Hy weet seker omtrent alles – behalwe, so lyk dit, Quirrell se toordery en hoe om verby Wollie te kom.

"Jy's al een wat weet hoe om verby Wollie te kom, of hoe, Hagrid?" vra Harry versigtig. "En jy sal vir niemand sê nie, sal jy? Nie eens vir een van die onderwysers nie?"

"Daar's nie 'n siel wat weet nie, net ek en Dompeldorius," sê Hagrid trots.

"Dis darem iets," mompel Harry aan die ander. "Hagrid, kan ons nie 'n venster oopmaak nie? Ek kook."

"Kan nie, Harry, jammer," sê Hagrid. Harry sien hoe hy na die vuur loer. Harry kyk ook.

"Hagrid – wat is *dit*?"

Maar hy weet reeds wat dit is. In die hart van die vuur, onder die ketel, lê 'n groot, swart eier.

“Ag,” sê Hagrid en vat-vat verleë aan sy baard. “Dis – h'm . . .”

“Waar kry jy dit, Hagrid?” vra Ron en buk oor die vuur om die eier beter te bekyk. “Dit moet 'n fortuin gekos het.”

“Het dit gewen,” sê Hagrid. “Laas nag. Was in die dorp, het 'n paar kappies gemaak en toe 'n paar potte kaart gespeel met 'n vreemdeling. Dink hy was nogal bly om daarvan ontslae te raak.”

“Maar wat gaan jy daarmee maak as dit eers uitgebroei het?” vra Hermien.

“Wel, ek het so 'n bietjie daaroor opgelees,” sê Hagrid en haal 'n groot boek onder sy kussing uit. “Het dit in die biblioteek gekry – *Draaktelery vir Pret en Profyt* – dis 'n bietjie outyds, maar dit het alles in. Hou die eier in die vuur, want die ma's blaas daarop, sien, en wanneer dit uitbroei, voer dit elke halfuur 'n emmer brandewyn gemeng met hoenderbloed. En kyk hier – hoe om die verskillende eiers uit te ken – wat ek hier het, is 'n Noorweegse Rifrug. Hulle's baie skaars.”

Hy lyk baie in sy skik met homself, maar Hermien is nie.

“Hagrid, jy woon in 'n houthuis,” sê sy.

Hagrid hoor nie. Hy neurie vrolik terwyl hy die vuur stook.

Nou is daar nog iets waaroor hulle hul kan bekommer: wat met Hagrid gaan gebeur as iemand moet agterkom dat hy 'n onwettige draak in sy hut wegsteek.

“Wonder hoe dit voel om 'n rustige lewe te lei,” sug Ron terwyl hulle aand na aand deur al die ekstra huiswerk worstel. Hermien het vir Harry en Ron ook 'n hersieningsrooster opgestel. Dit maak hulle waansinnig.

Een oggend tydens ontbyt bring Hedwig vir Harry nog 'n briefie van Hagrid af. Hy het net drie woorde geskryf: *Dit broei uit*.

Ron wil sommer die Herbologie-klas los en reguit na Hagrid se hut gaan. Hermien weier.

“Hermien, hoeveel keer in ons lewe sal ons 'n draak sien uitbroei?”

“Ons het klas, ons sal in die moeilikheid kom, en dis nog niks teen wat met Hagrid gaan gebeur as iemand moet uitvind wat hy doe –”

“Bly stil!” fluister Harry.

Malfoy is net 'n paar tree van hulle af en hy het gaan staan om te luister. Wat het hy alles gehoor? Harry hou glad nie van die uitdrukking op Malfoy se gesig nie.

Ron en Hermien loop en sry die hele ent pad na die Herbologie-klas en op die ou end stem Hermien in om tydens pouse saam met die ander twee na Hagrid se hut te hardloop. Toe die kasteelklok lui, laat die drie dadelik hul skoffels val en laat vat oor die terrein na die rand van die woud. Hagrid groet hulle. Hy lyk warm en opgewonde.

“Dis amper uit.” Hy lei hulle binnetoe.

Die eier lê op die tafel. Daar is diep krake in die dop. Binne-in roer iets; hulle hoor ’n snaakse klikgeluid.

Hulle trek hul stoele nader en hou die eier met ingehoue asem dop.

Skielik is daar ’n kraakgeluid en die dop bars oop. ’n Babadrakie tuimel uit op die tafel. Dis nie juis mooi nie; Harry dink dit lyk soos ’n verfrommelde swart sambreel. Die stekelrige vlerkies is yslik groot in vergelyking met die pikswart, maer, klein lyfie, dit het ’n lang snoet met groot neusgate, daar is stoppels waar die horings moet wees en dit het oranje uitpeuloë.

Dit nies. ’n Paar vonke spat uit sy snoet.

“Is hy nie *beeldskoon* nie?” mompel Hagrid. Hy steek ’n hand uit en streel die drakie se kop. Dit hap met klein skerp tandjies na sy vingers.

“Ag hoe *dierbaar*, kyk, hy ken sy mammiel!” sê Hagrid.

“Hagrid,” sê Hermien, “hoe vinnig groei ’n Noorweegse Rifrug gewoonlik?”

Hagrid is op die punt om te antwoord toe die kleur skielik uit sy gesig verdwyn – hy spring regop en storm na die venster.

“Wat’s fout?”

“Iemand het deur die skreef tussen die gordyne geloer – dis ’n kind – hy hardloop terug skool toe.”

Harry vlieg na die deur en kyk uit. Ten spyte van die afstand is daar geen twyfel nie.

Malfoy het die draak gesien.

Die volgende week maak iets aan die glimlag op Malfoy se gesig Harry, Ron en Hermien baie senuweeagtig. Hulle bring die meeste van hul vrye tyd in Hagrid se donker hut deur en probeer sin in sy kop praat.

“Laat hom net gaan,” sê Harry. “Laat hom vry.”

“Ek kan nie,” sê Hagrid. “Hy’s te klein. Hy sal doodgaan.”

Hulle kyk na die drakie. Dit is drie maal so groot as toe dit uitgebroei het, en dit binne ’n week. Daar krul die hele tyd rook deur sy neusgate. Hagrid doen nie meer sy boswagwerk nie, want die draak hou hom te besig. Lêë brandewynbottels en hoendervere lê gesaai oor die vloer.

“Ek het besluit om hom Norbert te noem,” sê Hagrid en kyk met mistige oë na die drakie. “Hy ken my al, kyk. Norbert! Norbert! Waar is mammiel?”

“Hy’t nie meer al sy varkies nie,” mompel Ron in Harry se oor.

“Hagrid,” sê Harry hard, “oor twee weke is Norbert so groot soos jou hut. Malfoy kan enige dag vir Dompeldorius gaan vertel.”

Hagrid byt sy lip.

“Ek – ek weet ek kan hom nie vir altyd hou nie, maar ek kan hom nie net iewers los nie, ek kan net nie.”

Harry draai na Ron.

“Charlie,” sê hy.

“Jou varkies is ook weg,” sê Ron. “Ek is Ron, onthou.”

“Nee – Charlie – jou broer Charlie. In Roemenië. Bestudeer drake. Ons kan Norbert na hom toe stuur. Charlie kan hom grootmaak en iewers vrylaat!”

“Briljant!” sê Ron. “Hoe lyk dit, Hagrid?”

Na 'n lang gesukkel laat Hagrid hulle uiteindelik toe om 'n uil na Charlie te stuur en hom te vra.

Die volgende week sleep verby. Woensdagaand is Hermien en Harry alleen in die geselskamer, lank na die ander al bed toe is. Die horlosie teen die muur het so pas middernag geslaan toe die portretopening oopbars. Ron verskyn uit die niet en gooi Harry se onsigbaarheidsmantel af. Hy was besig by Hagrid se hut om hom te help om vir Norbert wat teen hierdie tyd kratte vol dooie rotte verslind het, kos te gee.

“Hy't my gebyt!” sê hy en wys sy hand wat in 'n bebloede sakdoek toegewikkel is. “Ek sal vir 'n week nie 'n veerpen kan vashou nie. Ek sê jou, daardie draak is die aakligste gedrog wat ek nog gesien het, maar soos Hagrid te kere gaan, sou 'n mens sê dis 'n donsige klein konyntjie. Toe dit my byt, sê hy so ewe ek het dit bang gemaak. En toe ek loop, sing hy sowaar 'n wiegeliedjie vir die ding.”

Iets tok aan die donker venster.

“Dis Hedwig,” sê Harry en laat haar vinnig inkom. “Sy't seker Charlie se antwoord.”

Die drie leun vorentoe en lees die briefie.

Liewe Ron

Hoe gaan dit? Dankie vir die brief – ek sal die Noorweegse Rifrug graag neem, maar dit gaan nie maklik wees om hom hier te kry nie.

Ek dink die beste sal wees om hom saam met vriende van my wat volgende week kom kuier, te stuur. Die pobleem is, hulle moenie met 'n onwettige draak gesien word nie.

Kan jy die rifrug Saterdag om middernag op die hoogste toring hê? Hulle kan jou daar ontmoet en hom wegneem terwyl dit nog donker is.

Stuur 'n antwoord so gou as wat jy kan.

Liefde

Charlie

Hulle kyk na mekaar.

“Ons het die onsigbaarheidsmantel,” sê Harry. “Dit behoort nie te

moeilik te wees nie – ek dink dis groot genoeg vir twee van ons en vir Norbert.”

Dat die ander twee met hom saamstem, is ’n teken van hoe sleg dit die week gegaan het. Enigiets, solank hulle net ontslae kan raak van Norbert – en van Malfoy.

Daar is egter ’n haakplek. Teen die volgende dag is Ron se hand so geswel dat dit twee maal so groot as gewoonlik is. Hy weet nie of dit veilig is om na Madame Pomfrey te gaan nie – sê nou sy weet hoe ’n draak se tandemerke lyk? Later die middag het hy nie meer ’n keuse nie. Die wond is ’n nare groen kleur. Norbert se tande moet giftig wees.

Harry en Hermien haas hulle laatmiddag na die siekeboeg en kry vir Ron in die bed. Hy lyk ellendig.

“Dis nie net my hand nie,” fluister hy, “ek moet sê, dit voel of dit gaan afval. Malfoy het vir Madame Pomfrey gesê hy wil een van my boeke leen. Dit was net sodat hy vir my kan kom lag. Hy dreig die hele tyd hy gaan haar vertel wat my nou eintlik gebyt het – ek het vir haar gesê dis ’n hond, maar ek dink nie sy glo my nie – ek moes hom nie geslaan het daar by die Kwiddiek-wedstryd nie, dis hoekom hy dit doen.”

Harry en Hermien probeer hom kalmeer.

“Saterdag om middernag is alles oor,” sê Hermien, maar dit troos Ron nie. Hy wip regop in die bed en begin onbedaarlik sweet.

“Middernag, Saterdag!” sê hy in ’n hees stem. “O nee – o nee – nou onthou ek – Charlie se brief was in daardie boek wat Malfoy gevat het, hy gaan weet ons wil van Norbert ontslae raak.”

Harry en Hermien het nie kans om te antwoord nie. Op daardie oomblik kom Madame Pomfrey in en sê hulle moet gaan; Ron het slaap nodig.

“Dis nou te laat om ons planne te verander,” sê Harry vir Hermien. “Daar’s nie genoeg tyd om vir Charlie nog ’n uil te stuur nie en dis dalk ons laaste kans om van Norbert ontslae te raak. Ons sal die kans moet waag. En ons het die onsigbaarheidsmantel, Malfoy weet nie daarvan nie.”

Tande, die beerhond, sit buite die hut met ’n verband om sy stert toe hulle vir Hagrid gaan vertel. Hy maak die venster oop om met hulle te praat.

“Julle kan nie nou inkom nie,” sê hy blaas-blaas, “Norbert is in ’n moeilike stadium – maar dis niks wat ek nie kan hanteer nie.”

Hulle vertel hom van Charlie se brief en sy oë skiet vol trane, maar dit kan van Norbert wees wat hom so pas aan die been gebyt het.

“Aarg! Nee, alles is reg, dis net my stewel – hy speel net – hy’s net ’n baba.”

Die baba slaan sy stert teen die mure sodat die vensters ratel. Harry en Hermien loop vinnig terug kasteel toe en voel dat Saterdag nie gou genoeg kan kom nie.

Hulle sou dalk vir Hagrid jammer gewees het toe hy vir Norbert moet groet, as hulle nie so bekommerd was oor dit wat hulle moet doen nie. Dis 'n baie donker, bewolkte nag en hulle kom 'n bietjie laat by Hagrid se hut aan, want hulle moes wag tot Nurks klaar was in die ingangsportaal waar hy tennis teen die muur gespeel het.

Hagrid het vir Norbert in 'n groot krat gesit.

“Hy't 'n klomp rotte en brandewyn vir die rit,” sê Hagrid gebroke. “En ek't sy teddiebeer ook ingepak ingeval hy alleen voel.”

Daar kom nare geluide uit die krat wat vir Harry klink soos 'n teddiebeer waarvan die kop afgeskeur word.

“Tot siens, Norbert!” snik Hagrid toe Harry en Hermien die onsigbaarheidsmantel oor die krat gooi en self onder die mantel klim. “Mammie sal jou nooit vergeet nie!”

Hoe hulle dit reggekry het om die krat by die kasteel te kry, sou hulle nooit weet nie. Middernag tik nader terwyl hulle vir Norbert teen die marmertappe in die ingangsportaal uitsukkel en deur die donker gange dra. Op met nog 'n stel trappe, en nog een – selfs Harry se kortpaadjies help nie veel nie.

“Amper daar!” hyg Harry toe hulle in die gang onder die hoogste toring kom.

'n Skielike beweging voor hulle maak dat hulle die krat so amper laat val. Hulle vergeet skoon dat hulle onsigbaar is; hulle glip terug in die skaduwees en staar na die donker vorms van twee worstelende figure nie drie meter van hulle af nie. Skielik flikker 'n lamp.

Professor McGonagall, in 'n tartankamerjas en 'n haarnet, het vir Malfoy aan die oor beet.

“Detensie!” sê sy kwaai. “En twintig punte van Slibberin af! Loop so waar in die middel van die nag rond, hoe *durf* jy –”

“U verstaan nie, professor, Harry Potter is op pad hierheen – hy het 'n draak!”

“Watter louter snert! Hoe *durf* jy sulke leuens vertel! Kom, kom – ek sal professor Snerp hieroor inlig, Malfoy!”

Hierna is die steil wenteltrap na die spits van die toring die maklikste ding op aarde. Toe hulle bo in die koue naglug kom, gooi hulle die onsigbaarheidsmantel af, bly om weer 'n slag behoorlik te kan asemhaal. Hermien doen 'n klein dansie.

“Malfoy moet detensie doen! Ek kan sing!”

“Moenie,” keer Harry.

Terwyl hulle hulself verlekter in Malfoy se lot, stommel Norbert heen

en weer in die krat. Omtrent tien minute later swiep vier besems uit die donkerte op hulle neer.

Charlie se vriende is 'n uitgelate klomp. Hulle wys vir Harry en Hermien die harnas wat hulle gemaak het sodat Norbert tussen hulle kan hang. Almal help om Norbert stewig daarin vas te gespe en toe skud Harry en Hermien almal se hande en sê baie dankie.

Uiteindelik, daar gaan Norbert . . . hoër . . . hoër . . . weg.

Hulle glip af met die wenteltrap; noudat Norbert nie meer daar is nie, is hul harte net so lig soos hul arms. Die draak is weg – Malfoy het detensie – wat kan hul geluk bederf?

Die antwoord hierop wag aan die onderpunt van die trappe. Toe hulle uitstap in die gang, doem Fillis se gesig skielik uit die duisternis op.

“Wel, wel, wel,” fluister hy, “maar ons is in die moeilikheid, is ons nie?”

Hulle het die onsigbaarheidsmantel bo-op die toring laat lê.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN



THE FORBIDDEN FOREST

Things couldn't have been worse.

Filch took them down to Professor McGonagall's study on the first floor, where they sat and waited without saying a word to each other. Hermione was trembling. Excuses, alibis, and wild cover-up stories chased each other around Harry's brain, each more feeble than the last. He couldn't see how they were going to get out of trouble this time. They were cornered. How could they have been so stupid as to forget the Cloak? There was no reason on earth that Professor McGonagall would accept for their being out of bed and creeping around the school in the dead of night, let alone being up the tallest Astronomy Tower, which was out-of-bounds except for classes. Add Norbert and the Invisibility Cloak, and they might as well be packing their bags already.

Had Harry thought that things couldn't have been worse? He was wrong. When Professor McGonagall appeared, she was leading Neville.

"Harry!" Neville burst out, the moment he saw the other two. "I was trying to find you to warn you, I heard Malfoy saying he was going to catch you, he said you had a drag —"

Harry shook his head violently to shut Neville up, but Professor McGonagall had seen. She looked more likely to breathe fire than Norbert as she towered over the three of them.

"I would never have believed it of any of you. Mr. Filch says you were up in the Astronomy Tower. It's one o'clock in the morning.

Explain yourselves.”

It was the first time Hermione had ever failed to answer a teacher’s question. She was staring at her slippers, as still as a statue.

“I think I’ve got a good idea of what’s been going on,” said Professor McGonagall. “It doesn’t take a genius to work it out. You fed Draco Malfoy some cock-and-bull story about a dragon, trying to get him out of bed and into trouble. I’ve already caught him. I suppose you think it’s funny that Longbottom here heard the story and believed it, too?”

Harry caught Neville’s eye and tried to tell him without words that this wasn’t true, because Neville was looking stunned and hurt. Poor, blundering Neville — Harry knew what it must have cost him to try and find them in the dark, to warn them.

“I’m disgusted,” said Professor McGonagall. “Four students out of bed in one night! I’ve never heard of such a thing before! You, Miss Granger, I thought you had more sense. As for you, Mr. Potter, I thought Gryffindor meant more to you than this. All three of you will receive detentions — yes, you too, Mr. Longbottom, *nothing* gives you the right to walk around school at night, especially these days, it’s very dangerous — and fifty points will be taken from Gryffindor.”

“*Fifty?*” Harry gasped — they would lose the lead, the lead he’d won in the last Quidditch match.

“Fifty points *each*,” said Professor McGonagall, breathing heavily through her long, pointed nose.

“Professor — please —”

“You *can't* —”

“Don't tell me what I can and can't do, Potter. Now get back to bed, all of you. I've never been more ashamed of Gryffindor students.”

A hundred and fifty points lost. That put Gryffindor in last place. In one night, they'd ruined any chance Gryffindor had had for the House Cup. Harry felt as though the bottom had dropped out of his stomach. How could they ever make up for this?

Harry didn't sleep all night. He could hear Neville sobbing into his pillow for what seemed like hours. Harry couldn't think of anything to say to comfort him. He knew Neville, like himself, was dreading the dawn. What would happen when the rest of Gryffindor found out what they'd done?

At first, Gryffindors passing the giant hourglasses that recorded the House points the next day thought there'd been a mistake. How could they suddenly have a hundred and fifty points fewer than yesterday? And then the story started to spread: Harry Potter, the famous Harry Potter, their hero of two Quidditch matches, had lost them all those points, him and a couple of other stupid first years.

From being one of the most popular and admired people at the school, Harry was suddenly the most hated. Even Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs turned on him, because everyone had been longing to see Slytherin lose the House Cup. Everywhere Harry went, people pointed and didn't trouble to lower their voices as they insulted him. Slytherins, on the other hand, clapped as he walked past them, whistling and cheering, “Thanks Potter, we owe you one!”

Only Ron stood by him.

“They’ll all forget this in a few weeks. Fred and George have lost loads of points in all the time they’ve been here, and people still like them.”

“They’ve never lost a hundred and fifty points in one go, though, have they?” said Harry miserably.

“Well — no,” Ron admitted.

It was a bit late to repair the damage, but Harry swore to himself not to meddle in things that weren’t his business from now on. He’d had it with sneaking around and spying. He felt so ashamed of himself that he went to Wood and offered to resign from the Quidditch team.

“*Resign?*” Wood thundered. “What good’ll that do? How are we going to get any points back if we can’t win at Quidditch?”

But even Quidditch had lost its fun. The rest of the team wouldn’t speak to Harry during practice, and if they had to speak about him, they called him “the Seeker.”

Hermione and Neville were suffering, too. They didn’t have as bad a time as Harry, because they weren’t as well-known, but nobody would speak to them, either. Hermione had stopped drawing attention to herself in class, keeping her head down and working in silence.

Harry was almost glad that the exams weren’t far away. All the studying he had to do kept his mind off his misery. He, Ron, and Hermione kept to themselves, working late into the night, trying to remember the ingredients in complicated potions, learn charms and spells by heart, memorize the dates of magical discoveries and goblin rebellions. . . .

Then, about a week before the exams were due to start, Harry's new resolution not to interfere in anything that didn't concern him was put to an unexpected test. Walking back from the library on his own one afternoon, he heard somebody whimpering from a classroom up ahead. As he drew closer, he heard Quirrell's voice.

"No — no — not again, please —"

It sounded as though someone was threatening him. Harry moved closer.

"All right — all right —" he heard Quirrell sob.

Next second, Quirrell came hurrying out of the classroom straightening his turban. He was pale and looked as though he was about to cry. He strode out of sight; Harry didn't think Quirrell had even noticed him. He waited until Quirrell's footsteps had disappeared, then peered into the classroom. It was empty, but a door stood ajar at the other end. Harry was halfway toward it before he remembered what he'd promised himself about not meddling.

All the same, he'd have gambled twelve Sorcerer's Stones that Snape had just left the room, and from what Harry had just heard, Snape would be walking with a new spring in his step — Quirrell seemed to have given in at last.

Harry went back to the library, where Hermione was testing Ron on Astronomy. Harry told them what he'd heard.

"Snape's done it, then!" said Ron. "If Quirrell's told him how to break his Anti-Dark Force spell —"

"There's still Fluffy, though," said Hermione.

"Maybe Snape's found out how to get past him without asking Hagrid," said Ron, looking up at the thousands of books surrounding

them. “I bet there’s a book somewhere in here telling you how to get past a giant three-headed dog. So what do we do, Harry?”

The light of adventure was kindling again in Ron’s eyes, but Hermione answered before Harry could.

“Go to Dumbledore. That’s what we should have done ages ago. If we try anything ourselves we’ll be thrown out for sure.”

“But we’ve got no *proof*!” said Harry. “Quirrell’s too scared to back us up. Snape’s only got to say he doesn’t know how the troll got in at Halloween and that he was nowhere near the third floor — who do you think they’ll believe, him or us? It’s not exactly a secret we hate him, Dumbledore’ll think we made it up to get him sacked. Filch wouldn’t help us if his life depended on it, he’s too friendly with Snape, and the more students get thrown out, the better, he’ll think. And don’t forget, we’re not supposed to know about the Stone or Fluffy. That’ll take a lot of explaining.”

Hermione looked convinced, but Ron didn’t.

“If we just do a bit of poking around —”

“No,” said Harry flatly, “we’ve done enough poking around.”

He pulled a map of Jupiter toward him and started to learn the names of its moons.

The following morning, notes were delivered to Harry, Hermione, and Neville at the breakfast table. They were all the same:

Your detention will take place at eleven o’clock tonight.

Meet Mr. Filch in the entrance hall.

Professor M. McGonagall

Harry had forgotten they still had detentions to do in the furor over the points they'd lost. He half expected Hermione to complain that this was a whole night of studying lost, but she didn't say a word. Like Harry, she felt they deserved what they'd got.

At eleven o'clock that night, they said good-bye to Ron in the common room and went down to the entrance hall with Neville. Filch was already there — and so was Malfoy. Harry had also forgotten that Malfoy had gotten a detention, too.

"Follow me," said Filch, lighting a lamp and leading them outside.

"I bet you'll think twice about breaking a school rule again, won't you, eh?" he said, leering at them. "Oh yes . . . hard work and pain are the best teachers if you ask me. . . . It's just a pity they let the old punishments die out . . . hang you by your wrists from the ceiling for a few days, I've got the chains still in my office, keep 'em well oiled in case they're ever needed. . . . Right, off we go, and don't think of running off, now, it'll be worse for you if you do."

They marched off across the dark grounds. Neville kept sniffing. Harry wondered what their punishment was going to be. It must be something really horrible, or Filch wouldn't be sounding so delighted.

The moon was bright, but clouds scudding across it kept throwing them into darkness. Ahead, Harry could see the lighted windows of Hagrid's hut. Then they heard a distant shout.

"Is that you, Filch? Hurry up, I want ter get started."

Harry's heart rose; if they were going to be working with Hagrid it wouldn't be so bad. His relief must have showed in his face, because Filch said, "I suppose you think you'll be enjoying yourself with that

oaf? Well, think again, boy — it's into the forest you're going and I'm much mistaken if you'll all come out in one piece."

At this, Neville let out a little moan, and Malfoy stopped dead in his tracks.

"The forest?" he repeated, and he didn't sound quite as cool as usual. "We can't go in there at night — there's all sorts of things in there — werewolves, I heard."

Neville clutched the sleeve of Harry's robe and made a choking noise.

"That's your problem, isn't it?" said Filch, his voice cracking with glee. "Should've thought of them werewolves before you got in trouble, shouldn't you?"

Hagrid came striding toward them out of the dark, Fang at his heel. He was carrying his large crossbow, and a quiver of arrows hung over his shoulder.

"Abou' time," he said. "I bin waitin' fer half an hour already. All right, Harry, Hermione?"

"I shouldn't be too friendly to them, Hagrid," said Filch coldly, "they're here to be punished, after all."

"That's why yer late, is it?" said Hagrid, frowning at Filch. "Bin lecturin' them, eh? 'Snot your place ter do that. Yeh've done yer bit, I'll take over from here."

"I'll be back at dawn," said Filch, "for what's left of them," he added nastily, and he turned and started back toward the castle, his lamp bobbing away in the darkness.

Malfoy now turned to Hagrid.

"I'm not going in that forest," he said, and Harry was pleased to

hear the note of panic in his voice.

“Yeh are if yeh want ter stay at Hogwarts,” said Hagrid fiercely. “Yeh’ve done wrong an’ now yeh’ve got ter pay fer it.”

“But this is servant stuff, it’s not for students to do. I thought we’d be copying lines or something, if my father knew I was doing this, he’d —”

“— tell yer that’s how it is at Hogwarts,” Hagrid growled. “Copyin’ lines! What good’s that ter anyone? Yeh’ll do summat useful or yeh’ll get out. If yeh think yer father’d rather you were expelled, then get back off ter the castle an’ pack. Go on!”

Malfoy didn’t move. He looked at Hagrid furiously, but then dropped his gaze.

“Right then,” said Hagrid, “now, listen carefully, ’cause it’s dangerous what we’re gonna do tonight, an’ I don’ want no one takin’ risks. Follow me over here a moment.”

He led them to the very edge of the forest. Holding his lamp up high, he pointed down a narrow, winding earth track that disappeared into the thick black trees. A light breeze lifted their hair as they looked into the forest.

“Look there,” said Hagrid, “see that stuff shinin’ on the ground? Silvery stuff? That’s unicorn blood. There’s a unicorn in there bin hurt badly by summat. This is the second time in a week. I found one dead last Wednesday. We’re gonna try an’ find the poor thing. We might have ter put it out of its misery.”

“And what if whatever hurt the unicorn finds us first?” said Malfoy, unable to keep the fear out of his voice.

“There’s nothin’ that lives in the forest that’ll hurt yeh if yer with

me or Fang,” said Hagrid. “An’ keep ter the path. Right, now, we’re gonna split inter two parties an’ follow the trail in diff’rent directions. There’s blood all over the place, it must’ve bin staggerin’ around since last night at least.”

“I want Fang,” said Malfoy quickly, looking at Fang’s long teeth.

“All right, but I warn yeh, he’s a coward,” said Hagrid. “So me, Harry, an’ Hermione’ll go one way an’ Draco, Neville, an’ Fang’ll go the other. Now, if any of us finds the unicorn, we’ll send up green sparks, right? Get yer wands out an’ practice now — that’s it — an’ if anyone gets in trouble, send up red sparks, an’ we’ll all come an’ find yeh — so, be careful — let’s go.”

The forest was black and silent. A little way into it they reached a fork in the earth path, and Harry, Hermione, and Hagrid took the left path while Malfoy, Neville, and Fang took the right.

They walked in silence, their eyes on the ground. Every now and then a ray of moonlight through the branches above lit a spot of silver-blue blood on the fallen leaves.

Harry saw that Hagrid looked very worried.

“*Could* a werewolf be killing the unicorns?” Harry asked.

“Not fast enough,” said Hagrid. “It’s not easy ter catch a unicorn, they’re powerful magic creatures. I never knew one ter be hurt before.”

They walked past a mossy tree stump. Harry could hear running water; there must be a stream somewhere close by. There were still spots of unicorn blood here and there along the winding path.

“You all right, Hermione?” Hagrid whispered. “Don’ worry, it can’t’ve gone far if it’s this badly hurt, an’ then we’ll be able ter —

GET BEHIND THAT TREE!”

Hagrid seized Harry and Hermione and hoisted them off the path behind a towering oak. He pulled out an arrow and fitted it into his crossbow, raising it, ready to fire. The three of them listened. Something was slithering over dead leaves nearby: it sounded like a cloak trailing along the ground. Hagrid was squinting up the dark path, but after a few seconds, the sound faded away.

“I knew it,” he murmured. “There’s summat in here that shouldn’ be.”

“A werewolf?” Harry suggested.

“That wasn’ no werewolf an’ it wasn’ no unicorn, neither,” said Hagrid grimly. “Right, follow me, but careful, now.”

They walked more slowly, ears straining for the faintest sound. Suddenly, in a clearing ahead, something definitely moved.

“Who’s there?” Hagrid called. “Show yerself — I’m armed!”

And into the clearing came — was it a man, or a horse? To the waist, a man, with red hair and beard, but below that was a horse’s gleaming chestnut body with a long, reddish tail. Harry and Hermione’s jaws dropped.

“Oh, it’s you, Ronan,” said Hagrid in relief. “How are yeh?”

He walked forward and shook the centaur’s hand.

“Good evening to you, Hagrid,” said Ronan. He had a deep, sorrowful voice. “Were you going to shoot me?”

“Can’t be too careful, Ronan,” said Hagrid, patting his crossbow. “There’s summat bad loose in this forest. This is Harry Potter an’ Hermione Granger, by the way. Students up at the school. An’ this is Ronan, you two. He’s a centaur.”

“We’d noticed,” said Hermione faintly.

“Good evening,” said Ronan. “Students, are you? And do you learn much, up at the school?”

“Erm —”

“A bit,” said Hermione timidly.

“A bit. Well, that’s something.” Ronan sighed. He flung back his head and stared at the sky. “Mars is bright tonight.”

“Yeah,” said Hagrid, glancing up, too. “Listen, I’m glad we’ve run inter yeh, Ronan, ’cause there’s a unicorn bin hurt — you seen anythin’?”

Ronan didn’t answer immediately. He stared unblinkingly upward, then sighed again.

“Always the innocent are the first victims,” he said. “So it has been for ages past, so it is now.”

“Yeah,” said Hagrid, “but have yeh seen anythin’, Ronan? Anythin’ unusual?”

“Mars is bright tonight,” Ronan repeated, while Hagrid watched him impatiently. “Unusually bright.”

“Yeah, but I was meanin’ anythin’ unusual a bit nearer home,” said Hagrid. “So yeh haven’t noticed anythin’ strange?”

Yet again, Ronan took a while to answer. At last, he said, “The forest hides many secrets.”

A movement in the trees behind Ronan made Hagrid raise his bow again, but it was only a second centaur, black-haired and -bodied and wilder-looking than Ronan.

“Hullo, Bane,” said Hagrid. “All right?”

“Good evening, Hagrid, I hope you are well?”

“Well enough. Look, I’ve jus’ bin askin’ Ronan, you seen anythin’ odd in here lately? There’s a unicorn bin injured — would yeh know anythin’ about it?”

Bane walked over to stand next to Ronan. He looked skyward.

“Mars is bright tonight,” he said simply.

“We’ve heard,” said Hagrid grumpily. “Well, if either of you do see anythin’, let me know, won’t yeh? We’ll be off, then.”

Harry and Hermione followed him out of the clearing, staring over their shoulders at Ronan and Bane until the trees blocked their view.

“Never,” said Hagrid irritably, “try an’ get a straight answer out of a centaur. Ruddy stargazers. Not interested in anythin’ closer’n the moon.”

“Are there many of *them* in here?” asked Hermione.

“Oh, a fair few. . . . Keep themselves to themselves mostly, but they’re good enough about turnin’ up if ever I want a word. They’re deep, mind, centaurs . . . they know things . . . jus’ don’ let on much.”

“D’you think that was a centaur we heard earlier?” said Harry.

“Did that sound like hooves to you? Nah, if yeh ask me, that was what’s bin killin’ the unicorns — never heard anythin’ like it before.”

They walked on through the dense, dark trees. Harry kept looking nervously over his shoulder. He had the nasty feeling they were being watched. He was very glad they had Hagrid and his crossbow with them. They had just passed a bend in the path when Hermione grabbed Hagrid’s arm.

“Hagrid! Look! Red sparks, the others are in trouble!”

“You two wait here!” Hagrid shouted. “Stay on the path, I’ll come back for yeh!”

They heard him crashing away through the undergrowth and stood looking at each other, very scared, until they couldn't hear anything but the rustling of leaves around them.

"You don't think they've been hurt, do you?" whispered Hermione.

"I don't care if Malfoy has, but if something's got Neville . . . it's our fault he's here in the first place."

The minutes dragged by. Their ears seemed sharper than usual. Harry's seemed to be picking up every sigh of the wind, every cracking twig. What was going on? Where were the others?

At last, a great crunching noise announced Hagrid's return. Malfoy, Neville, and Fang were with him. Hagrid was fuming. Malfoy, it seemed, had sneaked up behind Neville and grabbed him as a joke. Neville had panicked and sent up the sparks.

"We'll be lucky ter catch anythin' now, with the racket you two were makin'. Right, we're changin' groups — Neville, you stay with me an' Hermione, Harry, you go with Fang an' this idiot. I'm sorry," Hagrid added in a whisper to Harry, "but he'll have a harder time frightenin' you, an' we've gotta get this done."

So Harry set off into the heart of the forest with Malfoy and Fang. They walked for nearly half an hour, deeper and deeper into the forest, until the path became almost impossible to follow because the trees were so thick. Harry thought the blood seemed to be getting thicker. There were splashes on the roots of a tree, as though the poor creature had been thrashing around in pain close by. Harry could see a clearing ahead, through the tangled branches of an ancient oak.

"Look —" he murmured, holding out his arm to stop Malfoy.

Something bright white was gleaming on the ground. They inched

closer.

It was the unicorn all right, and it was dead. Harry had never seen anything so beautiful and sad. Its long, slender legs were stuck out at odd angles where it had fallen and its mane was spread pearly-white on the dark leaves.

Harry had taken one step toward it when a slithering sound made him freeze where he stood. A bush on the edge of the clearing quivered. . . . Then, out of the shadows, a hooded figure came crawling across the ground like some stalking beast. Harry, Malfoy, and Fang stood transfixed. The cloaked figure reached the unicorn, lowered its head over the wound in the animal's side, and began to drink its blood.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAARGH!”

Malfoy let out a terrible scream and bolted — so did Fang. The hooded figure raised its head and looked right at Harry — unicorn blood was dribbling down its front. It got to its feet and came swiftly toward Harry — he couldn't move for fear.

Then a pain like he'd never felt before pierced his head; it was as though his scar were on fire. Half blinded, he staggered backward. He heard hooves behind him, galloping, and something jumped clean over Harry, charging at the figure.

The pain in Harry's head was so bad he fell to his knees. It took a minute or two to pass. When he looked up, the figure had gone. A centaur was standing over him, not Ronan or Bane; this one looked younger; he had white-blond hair and a palomino body.

“Are you all right?” said the centaur, pulling Harry to his feet.

“Yes — thank you — what *was* that?”

The centaur didn't answer. He had astonishingly blue eyes, like pale sapphires. He looked carefully at Harry, his eyes lingering on the scar that stood out, livid, on Harry's forehead.

"You are the Potter boy," he said. "You had better get back to Hagrid. The forest is not safe at this time — especially for you. Can you ride? It will be quicker this way.

"My name is Firenze," he added, as he lowered himself on to his front legs so that Harry could clamber onto his back.

There was suddenly a sound of more galloping from the other side of the clearing. Ronan and Bane came bursting through the trees, their flanks heaving and sweaty.

"Firenze!" Bane thundered. "What are you doing? You have a human on your back! Have you no shame? Are you a common mule?"

"Do you realize who this is?" said Firenze. "This is the Potter boy. The quicker he leaves this forest, the better."

"What have you been telling him?" growled Bane. "Remember, Firenze, we are sworn not to set ourselves against the heavens. Have we not read what is to come in the movements of the planets?"

Ronan pawed the ground nervously. "I'm sure Firenze thought he was acting for the best," he said in his gloomy voice.

Bane kicked his back legs in anger.

"For the best! What is that to do with us? Centaurs are concerned with what has been foretold! It is not our business to run around like donkeys after stray humans in our forest!"

Firenze suddenly reared on to his hind legs in anger, so that Harry had to grab his shoulders to stay on.

"Do you not see that unicorn?" Firenze bellowed at Bane. "Do you

not understand why it was killed? Or have the planets not let you in on that secret? I set myself against what is lurking in this forest, Bane, yes, with humans alongside me if I must.”

And Firenze whisked around; with Harry clutching on as best he could, they plunged off into the trees, leaving Ronan and Bane behind them.

Harry didn't have a clue what was going on.

“Why's Bane so angry?” he asked. “What was that thing you saved me from, anyway?”

Firenze slowed to a walk, warned Harry to keep his head bowed in case of low-hanging branches, but did not answer Harry's question. They made their way through the trees in silence for so long that Harry thought Firenze didn't want to talk to him anymore. They were passing through a particularly dense patch of trees, however, when Firenze suddenly stopped.

“Harry Potter, do you know what unicorn blood is used for?”

“No,” said Harry, startled by the odd question. “We've only used the horn and tail hair in Potions.”

“That is because it is a monstrous thing, to slay a unicorn,” said Firenze. “Only one who has nothing to lose, and everything to gain, would commit such a crime. The blood of a unicorn will keep you alive, even if you are an inch from death, but at a terrible price. You have slain something pure and defenseless to save yourself, and you will have but a half-life, a cursed life, from the moment the blood touches your lips.”

Harry stared at the back of Firenze's head, which was dappled silver in the moonlight.

“But who’d be that desperate?” he wondered aloud. “If you’re going to be cursed forever, death’s better, isn’t it?”

“It is,” Firenze agreed, “unless all you need is to stay alive long enough to drink something else — something that will bring you back to full strength and power — something that will mean you can never die. Mr. Potter, do you know what is hidden in the school at this very moment?”

“The Sorcerer’s Stone! Of course — the Elixir of Life! But I don’t understand who —”

“Can you think of nobody who has waited many years to return to power, who has clung to life, awaiting their chance?”

It was as though an iron fist had clenched suddenly around Harry’s heart. Over the rustling of the trees, he seemed to hear once more what Hagrid had told him on the night they had met: “Some say he died. Codswallop, in my opinion. Dunno if he had enough human left in him to die.”

“Do you mean,” Harry croaked, “that was *Vol* —”

“Harry! Harry, are you all right?”

Hermione was running toward them down the path, Hagrid puffing along behind her.

“I’m fine,” said Harry, hardly knowing what he was saying. “The unicorn’s dead, Hagrid, it’s in that clearing back there.”

“This is where I leave you,” Firenze murmured as Hagrid hurried off to examine the unicorn. “You are safe now.”

Harry slid off his back.

“Good luck, Harry Potter,” said Firenze. “The planets have been read wrongly before now, even by centaurs. I hope this is one of

those times.”

He turned and cantered back into the depths of the forest, leaving Harry shivering behind him.

Ron had fallen asleep in the dark common room, waiting for them to return. He shouted something about Quidditch fouls when Harry roughly shook him awake. In a matter of seconds, though, he was wide-eyed as Harry began to tell him and Hermione what had happened in the forest.

Harry couldn't sit down. He paced up and down in front of the fire. He was still shaking.

“Snape wants the Stone for Voldemort . . . and Voldemort's waiting in the forest . . . and all this time we thought Snape just wanted to get rich . . .”

“Stop saying the name!” said Ron in a terrified whisper, as if he thought Voldemort could hear them.

Harry wasn't listening.

“Firenze saved me, but he shouldn't have done so. . . . Bane was furious . . . he was talking about interfering with what the planets say is going to happen. . . . They must show that Voldemort's coming back. . . . Bane thinks Firenze should have let Voldemort kill me. . . . I suppose that's written in the stars as well.”

“Will you stop saying the name!” Ron hissed.

“So all I've got to wait for now is Snape to steal the Stone,” Harry went on feverishly, “then Voldemort will be able to come and finish me off. . . . Well, I suppose Bane'll be happy.”

Hermione looked very frightened, but she had a word of comfort.

“Harry, everyone says Dumbledore's the only one You-Know-Who

was ever afraid of. With Dumbledore around, You-Know-Who won't touch you. Anyway, who says the centaurs are right? It sounds like fortune-telling to me, and Professor McGonagall says that's a very imprecise branch of magic."

The sky had turned light before they stopped talking. They went to bed exhausted, their throats sore. But the night's surprises weren't over.

When Harry pulled back his sheets, he found his Invisibility Cloak folded neatly underneath them. There was a note pinned to it:

Just in case.

Die Verbode Woud

Slegter kan dit nie met hulle gaan nie.

Fillis neem hulle na professor McGonagall se studeerkamer op die eerste verdieping, waar hulle sit en wag sonder om 'n woord vir mekaar te sê. Hermien bewe. Verskonings, alibi's en wilde stories flits deur Harry se brein en die een klink flouer as die vorige een. Hy kan nie sien hoe hulle hierdie keer uit die moeilikheid gaan kom nie. Hulle is vas. Hoe kon hulle so onnosel wees om die mantel te vergeet het? Daar is geen rede op aarde wat professor McGonagall sal laat aanvaar dat hulle hierdie tyd van die nag in die skool se gange moes wees nie, wat nog te sê in die hoogste astronomietoring waar niemand na klasse mag kom nie. Sit Norbert en die onsigbaarheidsmantel ook nog by en hulle kan solank hul tasse gaan pak.

Het Harry gedink dit kan nie slegter met hulle gaan nie? Hy was verkeerd. Toe professor McGonagall inkom, het sy vir Neville aan die hand beet.

“Harry!” bars Neville uit, die oomblik toe hy hulle sien. “Ek het jou gesoek, ek wou jou kom waarsku, ek het Malfoy hoor sê hy gaan jou vang, jy’t ’n draa –”

Harry skud sy kop heftig heen en weer om Neville te laat stilbly, maar professor McGonagall het dit gesien. Soos sy daar oor hulle toring, lyk dit of sy groter vlamme as Norbert sal kan spoeg.

“Ek sou dit nie geglo het nie, nie van julle drie nie. Mnr. Fillis sê julle was in die astronomietoring. Dit is een-uur in die nag. *Verduidelik asseblief.*”

Dis die eerste keer dat Hermien nie ’n vraag kan beantwoord nie. So stil soos ’n standbeeld staar sy na haar pantoffels.

“Ek dink ek het ’n goeie idee van wat aan die gang is,” sê professor McGonagall. “’n Mens hoef nie ’n genie te wees om dit uit te werk nie. Julle het die een of ander vergesogte storie oor ’n draak aan Draco Malfoy vertel om hom uit die bed en in die moeilikheid te kry. Ek het hom reeds gevang. Ek reken julle dink dis snaaks dat Loggerenberg ook die storie gehoor en geglo het, nè?”

Harry vang Neville se oog en probeer hom sonder woorde vertel dat dit nie waar is nie, want Neville lyk verslae en seergemaak. Die arme Neville – Harry kan net dink hoe swaar dit vir hom moes wees om hulle in die donker te gaan soek.

“Ek is geskok,” sê professor McGonagall. “Vier studente uit die bed in een nag! Ek het nog nooit tevore van so iets gehoor nie! Jy, juffrou La Grange, ek dag jy het meer verstand. En jy, mnr. Potter, ek dag Griffindor beteken meer vir jou as dit. Julle al drie kry detensie – ja, jy ook, mnr. Loggerenberg, niks gee jou die reg om snags in die skool rond te loop nie, veral nie deesdae nie, dis uiters gevaarlik – en Griffindor verloor vyftig punte.”

“Vyftig?” Harry snak na asem – hulle was voor, hulle het voorgeloop na die laaste Kwiddiek-wedstryd.

“Vyftig punte *elk*,” sê professor McGonagall en haal swaar asem deur haar lang, skerp neus.

“Professor – asseblief –”

“U *kan* nie –”

“Moenie vir my sê wat ek kan en nie kan nie, Potter. Toe-toe, bed toe julle drie. Ek was nog nooit skamer vir Griffindor-studente as nou nie.”

’n Honderd-en-vyftig punte. Dit plaas Griffindor in die laaste plek. In een nag het hulle elke kans wat Griffindor gehad het om die huisbeker te verower, verwoes. Harry voel of hy kan doodgaan. Hoe kan hulle ooit hiervoor vergoed?

Daardie nag maak Harry nie ’n oog toe nie. Hy hoor hoe Neville uur na uur in sy kussing lê en snik. Harry kan aan niks dink om te sê wat hom sal troos nie. Hy weet Neville, soos hy, is doodbang vir die oggend. Wat gaan gebeur as die ander Griffindors moet uitvind wat hulle gedoen het?

Die Griffindors wat die volgende oggend verby die reuse-uurglase stap wat die huispunte aandui, dink eers dat daar iewers ’n fout is. Hoe kan hulle oornag ’n honderd-en-vyftig punte verloor het? Toe begin die storie loop: Harry Potter, die beroemde Harry Potter, die held van twee Kwiddiek-wedstryde, het al die punte vir hulle verloor, hy en ’n paar ander simpele eerstejaartjies.

Waar hy een van die gewildste mense was, een van dié wat die meeste bewonder is, is Harry skielik die mees gehate persoon in die skool. Selfs Raweklou en Hoesenproes draai hul rug op hom, want almal het gehoop dat Slibberin die huisbeker gaan verloor. Net waar Harry gaan, wys mense na hom; hulle laat sak nie eens hul stemme as hulle hom beledig nie. Die Slibberins, daarenteen, klap hande as hy verbystap en fluit en skree, “Dankie, Potter, jy’s ons held!”

Net Ron staan by hom.

“Oor ’n paar weke het hulle alles vergeet. Fred en George het al hordes

punte verloor in al die jare dat hulle hier is en die mense hou nog steeds van hulle.”

“Hulle het nog nooit ’n honderd-en-vyftig punte op een slag verloor nie, het hulle?” sê Harry mistroostig.

“Wel – nee,” erken Ron.

Dis ’n bietjie laat om die kwaad ongedaan te probeer maak, maar Harry neem hom voor dat hy nooit weer gaan inmeng met dinge wat niks met hom te doen het nie. Hy het genoeg gehad van rondsluip en spioeneer. Hy voel so skaam dat hy na Wood gaan en sê hy wil uit die Kwiddiek-span bedank.

“Bedank?” bulder Wood. “Wat sal dit tog help? Hoe gaan ons enige punte terugkry as ons nie nog Kwiddiek-wedstryde kan wen nie?”

Selfs Kwiddiek is nie meer pret nie. Tydens oefeninge praat die res van die span nie met Harry nie en as hulle van hom móét praat, dan sê hulle, “die Soeker”.

Hermien en Neville kry ook swaar. Nie so swaar soos Harry nie, want hulle is nie so bekend soos hy nie, maar niemand praat ook met hulle nie. Hermien probeer nie meer om aandag te trek in die klas nie. Sy hou haar kop laag oor haar boeke en werk in stilte.

Harry is amper bly dat die eksamen op hande is. Al die hersiening wat hy moet doen, trek ten minste sy aandag van sy ellendes af. Hy, Ron en Hermien hou hulle eenkant en werk tot laat in die nag en probeer om al die bestanddele van ingewikkelde towerdrankies te onthou, om tower-spreuke uit die kop op te sê en om die datums van al die toorontdekkings en gnoom-rebellies te onthou . . .

Omtrent ’n week voor die eksamen begin, word Harry se voorneme om nie meer in te meng nie, onverwags getoets. Toe hy een middag alleen van die biblioteek af kom, hoor hy ’n kla-stemmetjie uit een van die klaskamers voor hom in die gang. Toe hy nader kom, herken hy Quirrell se stem.

“Nee – nee – nie weer nie, asseblief –”

Dit klink asof iemand hom dreig. Harry sluip nader.

“Goed dan – goed dan –” hoor hy Quirrell snik.

Die volgende oomblik storm Quirrell uit die klaskamer. Hy stoot sy tulband reg. Hy is bleek en dit lyk of hy huil. Hy verdwyn vinnig om die hoek; Harry dink nie Quirrell het hom eens gesien nie. Hy wag tot Quirrell se voetstappe stil word en loer by die klaskamer in. Dit is leeg, maar ’n deur aan die oorkant staan halfoop. Harry is halfpad daar voor hy sy voorneme om nie in te meng nie, onthou.

Harry sal twaalf towenaarstene wed dat Snerp so pas by daardie deur uit is, en na wat Harry gehoor het, loop Snerp nou beslis met ’n wip in sy stap – want dit klink of Quirrell so pas ingegee het.

Hy gaan terug biblioteek toe, waar Hermien Ron se Astronomie toets. Harry vertel hulle wat hy gehoor het.

“Snerp het dit dus reggekry!” sê Ron. “As Quirrell hom vertel het hoe om sy Anti-Donker-Mag-towerspreuk –”

“Wollie is darem nog daar,” sê Hermien.

“Dalk weet Snerp klaar hoe om verby hom te kom sonder dat hy eens vir Hagrid hoef te vra,” sê Ron en kyk na die duisende boeke om hulle. “Ek wed hier iewers is ’n boek oor hoe om verby driekoppige honde te kom. Wat maak ons nou, Harry?”

Die lig van avontuur flikker al weer in Ron se oë, maar Hermien antwoord voor Harry iets kan sê.

“Gaan na Dompeldorius. Dis wat ons al eeue gelede moes gedoen het. As ons weer iets moet probeer, gaan ons vir seker geskors word.”

“Maar ons het geen bewyse nie!” sê Harry. “Quirrell is te bang om ons te steun. Snerp moet net sê dat hy nie weet hoe die trol op Allerheilig-aand ingekom het nie en dat hy glad nie naby die derde verdieping was nie – vir wie dink jy gaan hulle glo, vir hom of vir ons? Dis nie juis ’n geheim dat ons hom haat nie. Dompeldorius sal dink ons het alles versin sodat hy uitgeskop moet word. Fillis sal ons nie help nie, al hang sy lewe daarvan af, hy’s pëlle met Snerp, en hoe meer studente geskors word, hoe beter, is al wat hy sal sê. En onthou, ons is nie veronderstel om van die Steen of van Wollie te weet nie. Hoe gaan ons dit alles verduidelik?” Hermien lyk oortuig, maar nie Ron nie.

“As ons net so ’n bietjie rondkyk –”

“Nee,” sê Harry beslis, “ons het al heeltemal genoeg rondgekyk.”

Hy trek ’n kaart van Jupiter nader en begin om die name van die mane te leer.

Die volgende oggend tydens ontbyt word briefies afgelewer vir Harry, Hermien en Neville. Almal lyk dieselfde:

*Jul detensie sal plaasvind vannag om elfuur. Ontmoet
mnr. Fillis in die ingangsportaal.
Prof. M. McGonagall*

Met al die oproer oor die punte wat hulle verloor het, het Harry skoon van die detensie vergeet. Hy verwag half dat Hermien gaan kla omdat hulle ’n hele aand se hersiening gaan verloor, maar sy sê nie ’n woord nie. Soos Harry, voel sy dat dit hul verdiende loon is.

Daardie aand om elfuur sê hulle vir Ron tot siens in die geselskamer en stap saam met Neville na die ingangsportaal. Fillis is reeds daar – en so ook Malfoy. Harry het al vergeet dat Malfoy ook detensie moet doen.

“Volg my,” sê Fillis, steek ’n lamp aan en lei hulle na buite.

“Ek wed julle sal twee keer dink voor julle weer skoolreëls oortree, of hoe?” sê hy en grynsag vir hulle. “O ja . . . harde werk en pyn is die beste

leermeesters as jy my vra . . . net jammer hulle laat al die goeie ou strawwe uitsterf . . . soos aan die polse van die dak af hang, ek *het* nog die kettings in my kantoor, hou hulle goed geolie ingeval ek hulle weer nodig kry . . . reg, weg is ons, en moenie probeer weghol nie, dit sal net slegter met julle gaan.”

Hulle marsjeer oor die donker terrein. Neville snuif die hele tyd. Harry wonder wat hul straf gaan wees. Seker iets aakligs, anders sal Fillis nie so in sy skik lyk nie.

Die maan is helder, maar die wolke wat verbydryf, gooi die hele tyd skaduwees oor hulle. Ver voor hom sien Harry die verligte vensters van Hagrid se hut. Dan hoor hulle ’n geskree wat uit die verte kom.

“Is dit jy, Fillis? Skud op, ek wil begin.”

Harry se hart mis ’n slag; as hulle saam met Hagrid moet werk, sal dit darem seker nie so erg wees nie. Die verligting moet op sy gesig gewys het, want Fillis sê, “Jy dink seker jy gaan pret hê saam met daardie lum-mel? Wel, dink weer, boet – dis bos toe met julle en ek sal verbaas wees as julle in een stuk aan die ander kant uitkom.”

Toe hulle hierdie woorde hoor, kreun Neville en Malfoy steek vas in sy spore.

“Die bos?” herhaal hy en hy klink glad nie so voor op die wa soos gewoonlik nie. “Ons kan nie in die nag daar gaan rondloop nie – daar’s al-lerhande goed daar – weerwolwe, het iemand gesê.”

Neville gryp Harry se mou en maak ’n wurggeluid.

“Dis jou eie skuld, dan nie?” sê Fillis en sy stem kraak van lekkerkry. “Moes aan daardie weerwolwe gedink het voor jy moeilikheid gemaak het, of hoe?”

Hagrid kom aangestap uit die donker met Tande op sy hakke. Hy dra ’n groot kruisboog en het ’n koker vol pyle oor sy skouer geslinger.

“Omtrent tyd ook,” sê hy. “Ek wag al langer as ’n halfuur. Alles reg, Harry, Hermien?”

“Ek sal nie so vriendelik met hulle wees nie, Hagrid,” sê Fillis koud. “Hulle is hier om gestraf te word, dis wat.”

“So, dis hoekom jy laat is,” sê Hagrid en frons vir Fillis. “Vir hulle loop en preek? Is g’n jou plek om dit te doen nie. Jy’t jou deel gehad, nou’s dit my beurt.”

“Teen dagbreek is ek hier,” sê Fillis, “vir wat van hulle oor is,” voeg hy by en stap haastig terug kasteel toe met sy lamp wat heen en weer in die donkerte swaai.

Nou draai Malfoy na Hagrid.

“Ek gaan nie in daardie bos in nie,” sê hy en Harry kry lekker toe hy hoor hoe bang Malfoy se stem klink.

“Jy gaan as jy by Hogwarts wil bly,” sê Hagrid kwaai. “Jy’t kwaad gedoen en nou gaan jy daarvoor betaal.”

“Maar dis bediendes se werk, dis nie vir studente nie. Ek dag ons gaan reëls uitskryf of iets, as my pa moet weet wat ek moet doen, sal hy –”

“– vir jou sê dis hoe dit by Hogwarts gaan,” grom Hagrid. “Uitskryf! Wat sal dit nogal help? Jy gaan iets nuttigs doen, of anders moet jy jou goed vat en loop. As jy dink jou pa sal eerder sien hoe jy uitgeskop word, gaaf, gaan terug kasteel toe en loop pak jou tasse. Toe, skoert!”

Malfoy roer nie. Woedend staar hy na Hagrid, maar dan laat sak hy sy oë.

“Goed dan,” sê Hagrid, “nou luister mooi, want dis gevaarlike dinge wat ons gaan doen en ek wil nie hê iemand moet onnodige kanse waag nie. Kom hier agter my aan.”

Hy lei hulle na die kant van die woud. Hy hou sy lamp hoog in die lug en beduie na ’n smal, kronkelende paadjie wat tussen die digte, swart bome verdwyn. ’n Ligte briesie speel met hul hare terwyl hulle die donker woud in staar.

“Kyk daar,” sê Hagrid, “sien julle daardie blink goed op die grond? So silwerig? Dis eenhoringbloed. Iemand het ’n eenhoring lelik seergemaak. Dis die tweede keer hierdie week. Laas Woensdag het ek ’n dooie een gekry. Ons moet die arme ding gaan soek. Dalk moet ons hom uit sy ellende help.”

“En wat as wie dit ook al is wat die eenhoring seergemaak het, vir ons vang?” sê Malfoy en hy kry dit nie reg om die vrees uit sy stem te hou nie.

“Daar’s niks in die woud wat julle kan seermaak as julle by my of by Tande is nie,” sê Hagrid. “En bly in die paadjie. Reg, ons gaan nou in twee groepe verdeel en die spoor in verskillende rigtings volg. Daar is bloed oral oor die plek, die dier moet al van laas nag af hier rondsteier.”

“Ek vat vir Tande,” sê Malfoy vinnig en kyk na Tande se groot bek.

“Goed, goed, maar ek waarsku jou, hy’s ’n papbroek,” sê Hagrid. “Dan stap ek en Harry en Hermien hierdie kant toe en Draco, Neville en Tande gaan daai kant toe. As julle die eenhoring kry, moet julle groen vonke die lug in stuur. Haal jul towerstawwe uit en oefen gou – dis goed, ja – en as daar moeilikheid is, stuur rooi vonke, dan sal ons kom – wees versigtig – kom ons waai.”

Die woud is donker en stil. ’n Entjie verder kom hulle by ’n vurk in die voetpaadjie en Harry, Hermien en Hagrid gaan na links, terwyl Malfoy, Neville en Tande na regs gaan.

Hulle loop in stilte, hul oë op die grond. Elke nou en dan verlig ’n maanstraal wat deur die takke bo hulle val, ’n kolletjie silwerblou bloed op die droë blare.

Harry sien dat Hagrid baie bekommerd lyk.

“Kan ’n weerwolf ’n eenhoring doodmaak?” vra Harry.

“Is nie vinnig genoeg nie,” sê Hagrid. “Dis nie maklik om ’n eenhoring

te vang nie, hulle is kragtige toordiere. Ek het nog nooit tevore gehoor van een wat seergekry het nie.”

Hulle stap verby ’n mosoordekte boomstomp. Harry hoor iewers water loop, daar moet ’n stroompie naby wees. Hier en daar langs die kronkelende paadjie lê nog druppels bloed.

“Alles nog reg, Hermien?” fluister Hagrid. “Moenie bang wees nie, dit kan nie ver wees as dit so seergekry het nie en dan kan ons – GOU, AGTER DIE BOOM IN!”

Hagrid gryp vir Harry en Hermien en pluk hulle agter ’n reusagtige eikeboom in. Hy haal ’n pyl uit en sit dit in sy kruisboog en staan oorgehaal om te skiet. Die drie van hulle luister. Iets glip oor die droë blare daar naby: dit klink soos ’n mantel wat oor die grond sleep. Hagrid loer na die donker paadjie, maar ’n paar sekondes later het die geluid verdwyn.

“Ek het dit geweet,” mompel hy. “Hier’s iets wat nie hier moet wees nie.”

“’n Weerwolf?” stel Harry voor.

“Dit was nie ’n weerwolf nie en dit was ook nie ’n eenhoring nie,” sê Hagrid grimmig. “Nou toe, volg my, maar kyk waar julle loop.”

Nou stap hulle baie stadiger, hul ore gespits vir die kleinste geluidjie. Skielik, in die oopte voor hulle, beweeg iets.

“Wie’s daar?” roep Hagrid. “Kom uit – ek is gewapen!”

En in die oopte verskyn – is dit ’n man of ’n perd? Tot by sy middel is dit ’n man met rooi hare en ’n rooi baard, maar die res is die kastaiingbruin lyf van ’n perd, een met ’n lang rooibruin stert. Harry en Hermien se monde val oop.

“O, dis jy, Ronan,” sê Hagrid verlig. “Hoe gaan dit?”

Hy stap nader en skud die sentour se hand.

“Goeienaand, Hagrid,” sê Ronan. Hy het ’n diep, hartseer stem. “Wou jy my skiet?”

“Kan nie te versigtig wees nie, Ronan,” sê Hagrid en streel sy kruisboog. “Daar’s iets aan die gang in die woud. Terloops, dit is Harry Potter en Hermien la Grange. Studente by die skool. En dis Ronan, julle twee. Hy’s ’n perdmens.”

“So het ons gesien,” sê Hermien floutjies.

“Goeienaand,” sê Ronan. “Studente, h’m? En het julle al iets by die skool geleer?”

“Mm.”

“So ’n bietjie,” sê Hermien.

“’n Bietjie. Wel dis ook iets.” Ronan sug. Hy gooi sy kop terug en staar na die hemel. “Mars is helder vannag.”

“Ja,” sê Hagrid en kyk ook op. “Luister, ek is bly ons het in jou vasgeloop, Ronan, want daar’s ’n eenhoring hier iewers wat seergekry het – het jy dalk iets gesien?”

Ronan antwoord nie dadelik nie. Hy staar boontoe, sonder om 'n oog te knip, dan sug hy weer.

“Dis altyd die onskuldiges wat eerste seerkry,” sê hy. “So het dit deur die eeue gegaan en so gaan dit nou nog.”

“Ja,” sê Hagrid, “maar het jy iets gesien, Ronan? Enigiets ongewoons?”

“Mars is helder vannag,” herhaal Ronan terwyl Hagrid ongeduldig na hom kyk. “Ongewoon helder.”

“Ja, maar ek bedoel iets hier onder wat ongewoon is,” sê Hagrid. “Jy’t dus niks snaaks opgelet nie?”

Weer antwoord Ronan nie dadelik nie. Uiteindelik sê hy, “Die woud bewaar baie geheime.”

’n Beweging in die bome agter Ronan laat Hagrid weer sy boog lig, maar dis net ’n tweede sentour. Hy het swart hare en is swart van lyf en lyk wilder as Ronan.

“Dagsê, Belladonna,” sê Hagrid. “Gaan dit goed?”

“Goeienaand, Hagrid. Ek hoop dit gaan goed met jou.”

“Goed genoeg. Luister, ek vra nou net vir Ronan, het julle nie iets snaaks hier rond gesien nie? Daar’s ’n eenhoring wat seergekry het – weet jy dalk iets daarvan af?”

Belladonna stap na Ronan en gaan staan langs hom. Hy kyk na die sterrehemel.

“Mars is helder vannag,” is al wat hy sê.

“So hoor ons,” sê Hagrid iesegrimmig. “Wel, as julle dalk iets sien, laat my weet, ons moet gaan.”

Harry en Hermien stap omkyk-omkyk agter hom aan tot Ronan en Belladonna agter die bome verdwyn.

“Moet nooit,” sê Hagrid vies, “’n reguit antwoord uit ’n sentour probeer kry nie. Spul sterrekykers. Stel in niks belang wat nader as die maan is nie.”

“Is daar baie van hulle hier in die woud?” vra Hermien.

“O, ’n hele paar . . . Hou hulle eenkant, maar hulle kom gewoonlik as ek met hulle wil praat. Hulle’s diep, die sentours . . . hulle weet dinge . . . gee niks weg nie.”

“Dink jy dit was ’n sentour wat ons vroeër vanaand gehoor het?” vra Harry.

“Het dit vir jou soos hoewe geklink? Nee, as jy my vra, was dit die ding wat die eenhorings doodmaak – het nog nooit tevore so iets gehoor nie.”

Hulle stap dieper die digte donker woud in. Harry hou aan kyk oor sy skouer. Hy het hierdie nare gevoel dat iets hulle dophou. Hy is baie bly dat Hagrid met sy kruisboog by hulle is. Hulle gaan net om ’n draai in die pad toe Hermien Hagrid se arm vasgryp.

“Hagrid! Kyk! Rooi vonke, die ander is in die moeilikheid!”

“Wag julle twee net hier,” skree Hagrid. “Bly in die pad. Ek kom julle nou haal!”

Hulle hoor hoe hy deur die kreupelhout bars. Hulle bly net daar staan en kyk na mekaar, doodbang, tot hulle niks anders as die ritselende blare om hulle kan hoor nie.

“Dink jy hulle het iets oorgekom?” fluister Hermien.

“Ek gee nie om as iets met Malfoy gebeur het nie, maar Neville . . . dis in die eerste plek ons skuld dat hy hier is.”

Die tyd sleep verby. Dis of hul ore skerper as gewoonlik is. Dit voel vir Harry of hy elke sug van die wind kan hoor, elke takkie wat kraak. Wat gaan aan? Waar bly die ander?

Uiteindelik kondig ’n harde knarsgeluid Hagrid se terugkoms aan. Malfoy, Neville en Tande loop agter hom aan. Hagrid is rooi van woede. Dit blyk dat Malfoy vir Neville vir die grap van agter af bekruipe en op hom gespring het. Neville het geskrik en die rooi vonke getoor.

“Ons kan gelukkig wees as ons iets vang met die kabaal wat julle twee opgeskop het! Reg, ons verander die groepe – Neville, jy bly hier by my en Hermien, Harry, jy gaan saam met Tande en hierdie idioot. Ek is jammer,” voeg Hagrid in ’n fluisterstem by, “maar hy sal meer sukkel om jou bang te maak en ons moet klaarkry.”

Harry stap na die middel van die woud saam met Malfoy en Tande. Hulle loop vir langer as ’n halfuur, dieper en dieper die woud in tot dit amper onmoontlik is om die pad deur die digte bome te volg. Dit lyk vir Harry of die bloedkolle groter word. Daar is vlekke op die boomwortels asof die arme dier daar van pyn geworstel het. Deur die vergroeide takke van ’n stokou eikeboom sien Harry ’n oopte voor hulle.

“Kyk –” mompel hy en hou sy arm uit sodat Malfoy moet stop.

Op die grond voor hulle lê iets wat skitterwit is. Tree vir tree sluip hulle nader.

Dit is die eenhoring en hy is dood. Harry het nog nooit tevore iets gesien wat so mooi en ook so hartseer is nie. Die lang maer bene staan oorehoeks soos die dier geval het, en die manhaar lê pêrelwit uitgesprei oor die donker blare.

Harry tree vorentoe, maar ’n ritselende geluid laat hom in sy spore vassteek. ’n Bos aan die kant van die oopte skud . . . Toe verskyn ’n figuur gehul in ’n mantel uit die skaduwees en kruip soos ’n roofdier hande-viervoet oor die grond. Harry, Malfoy en Tande staan of hul versteen is. Die figuur is by die eenhoring, sy kop sak oor die wond in die dier se sy en hy begin om die bloed uit te suig.

“AAAAAAARG!”

Malfoy los ’n vreeslike kreet en storm weg – en so ook Tande. Die figuur lig sy kop en kyk reg na Harry – eenhoringbloed drup oor sy bors. Hy kom orent en pyl reguit op Harry af – wat so bang is dat hy nie kan roer nie.

'n Pyn soos hy nog nooit tevore gevoel het nie, skiet deur Harry se kop, dis of sy litteken aan die brand geslaan het – halfverblind steier hy agteroor. Hy hoor hoewe agter hom nader galop, toe spring iets oor hom en storm op die figuur af.

Die pyn in Harry se kop is so erg dat hy op sy knieë neersak. Dit neem 'n paar oomblikke om te bedaar. Toe hy opkyk, is die figuur in die mantel weg. 'n Sentour staan oor hom, nie Ronan of Belladonna nie; hierdie een lyk jonger; hy het witblonde hare en die lyf van 'n palomino.

“Is alles reg?” vra die sentour en help Harry op.

“Ja – dankie – wat was dit?”

Die sentour antwoord nie. Hy het verstommende blou oë, soos bleek saffiere. Hy bekyk Harry sorgvuldig, sy oë speel oor die litteken wat rooi uitstaan op Harry se voorkop.

“Jy moet die Potter-seun wees,” sê hy. “Jy moet teruggaan na Hagrid toe. Die woud is nie nou veilig nie – veral nie vir jou nie. Kan jy perdry? Dit sal vinniger wees.”

“My naam is Firenze,” voeg hy by toe hy op sy voorbene neersak sodat Harry op sy rug kan klouter.

Skielik klink die geluid van galoppende hoewe op van die oorkant van die oop area. Ronan en Belladonna bars deur die bome, hulle is natgesweet en hul flanke dein op en neer.

“Firenze!” bulder Belladonna. “Wat vang jy aan? Daar is 'n mens op jou rug! Het jy geen trots nie? Is jy dan net 'n doodgewone muil?”

“Weet jy wie dit is?” sê Firenze. “Dit is die Potter-seun. Hoe gouer hy uit die woud kom, hoe beter.”

“Wat het jy vir hom gesê?” grom Belladonna. “Onthou, Firenze, ons het gesweer om die hemele nie teen te gaan nie. Het ons nie in die bewegings van die planete gelees wat gaan gebeur nie?”

Ronan kap senuagtig met sy hoewe in die grond.

“Ek is seker Firenze doen dit wat hy dink is die beste,” sê hy op sy bedrukte manier.

Belladonna skop agterop van ergernis.

“Die beste! Wat het dit met ons te doen? Sentours hou hulle besig met die dinge wat voorspel word! Dis nie in ons belang om soos donkies agter verdwaalde mense in ons woud aan te loop nie!”

Firenze steier skielik op sy agterpote, so kwaad is hy. Harry moet sy skouers vasgryp om bo te bly.

“Sien jy daardie eenhoring?” brul Firenze. “Besef jy hoekom hy dood is? Of het die planete jou nie die geheim vertel nie? Ek kom in opstand teen dit wat hier in die woud skuil, Belladonna, ja, ek skaar my by die mense as ek moet.”

Met hierdie woorde vlieg Firenze om en verdwyn tussen die bome, terwyl Harry vir sy lewe klou en Ronan en Belladonna hulle agternastaar.

Harry kan nie kop of stert uitmaak van wat aan die gang is nie.

“Hoekom is Belladonna so kwaad?” vra hy. “En wat is daardie ding waarvan jy my gered het?”

Nou stap Firenze; hy waarsku Harry om sy kop laag te hou ingeval daar lae oorhangende takke is, maar hy beantwoord nie Harry se vraag nie. Die stilte word so lank dat Harry begin dink dat Firenze nie meer met hom wil praat nie. Toe hy deur ’n besonder ruie klompie bome stap, gaan Firenze skielik staan.

“Harry Potter, weet jy waarvoor eenhoringbloed gebruik word?”

“Nee,” sê Harry verras deur die vreemde vraag. “Ons het nog net die horing en sterthare in ons towerdrankies gebruik.”

“Dis omdat dit monsteraagtig is om ’n eenhoring dood te maak,” sê Firenze. “Net iemand wat niks het om te verloor nie en alles om te wen, sal so ’n misdaad pleeg. Die bloed van die eenhoring sal jou aan die lewe hou, selfs al is jy op die randjie van die dood, maar teen ’n vreeslike prys. Jy het iets wat rein en weerloos is, doodgemaak om jouself te red en jy sal net ’n halwe lewe hê. ’n Vervloekte lewe, van die oomblik dat die bloed aan jou lippe raak.”

Harry staar na Firenze se agterkop wat gevlek is met silwer in die lig van die maan.

“Maar wie is so desperaat?” wonder hy hardop. “As jy vir altyd vervloek gaan wees, is dit mos beter om dood te gaan, of hoe?”

“Dit is,” sê Firenze, “behalwe as jy net lank genoeg aan die lewe moet bly tot jy iets anders kan drink – iets wat jou volle sterkte en krag sal herstel – iets wat sal maak dat jy nooit doodgaan nie. Mnr. Potter, weet jy wat op hierdie oomblik in die skool weggesteek word?”

“Die Towenaarsteen! Natuurlik – die Elik sir van die Lewe! Maar ek verstaan nog nie wie –”

“Kan jy glad nie dink wie al baie jare wag om sy mag terug te kry nie, wie aan die lewe klou, terwyl hy sy kans afwag nie?”

Dis of ’n ystervuis skielik om Harry se hart sluit. Bo die geritsel van die bome hoor hy weer eens wat Hagrid die aand toe hulle ontmoet het, vir hom gesê het: “Party sê hy’s dood. Bog, sou ek sê. Weet nie of daar genoeg mense in hom oor was om te kon doodgaan nie.”

“Bedoel jy,” sê Harry skor, “dat dit Wol –”

“Harry! Harry, is alles reg?”

Hermien kom met die paadjie langs aangehardloop, Hagrid kom blaas-blaas agterna.

“Ek’s doodreg,” sê Harry, maar hy weet skaars wat hy sê. “Die eenhoring is dood, Hagrid, dis in die oop kol daar agter.”

“Ek moet tot siens sê,” mompel Firenze terwyl Hagrid wegstorm om na die eenhoring te gaan kyk. “Jy is nou veilig.”

Harry gly van sy rug af.

“Voorspoed, Harry Potter,” sê Firenze. “Die planeet is al voorheen verkeerd gelees, selfs deur sentours. Ek hoop dit is een van daardie kere.”

Hy draai om en galop terug in die dieptes van die woud, terwyl Harry hom bewend agternak.

Ron het in die geselskamer aan die slaap geraak terwyl hy wag dat die ander drie moet terugkom. Hy roep iets uit oor Kwiddiek en vuilspeel toe Harry hom rof wakker skud. Binne 'n paar oomblikke is sy oë wyd oop, terwyl Harry vir hom en Hermien vertel wat alles in die woud gebeur het.

Harry kan nie sit nie. Hy stap op en neer voor die vuur. Hy bewe nog steeds.

“Snerp wil die Steen vir Woldemort hê . . . en Woldemort wag in die woud . . . en die hele tyd dink ons Snerp wil net ryk word . . .”

“Hou tog op om daardie naam te sê!” fluister Ron benoud, nes of Woldemort hulle kan hoor.

Harry luister nie.

“Firenze het my gered, maar hy moes dit nie gedoen het nie . . . Belladonna was woedend . . . hy't aangegaan oor inmeng met wat die planeet sê gaan gebeur . . . hulle wys seker dat Woldemort gaan terugkom. Belladonna dink Firenze moes Woldemort toegelaat het om my dood te maak . . . dit staan seker ook in die sterre.”

“Hou op om daardie naam te sê!” sis Ron.

“Dus moet ek net wag tot Snerp die Steen gesteel het,” gaan Harry koersig voort, “dan sal Woldemort in staat wees om my te kom doodmaak . . . wel, ek reken Belladonna sal seker bly wees.”

Hermien lyk nou baie bang, maar sy dink tog aan iets wat kan troos.

“Harry, almal sê Dompeldorius is die enigste een vir wie Jy-Weet-Wie bang is. Met Dompeldorius in die rondte kan Jy-Weet-Wie niks aan jou doen nie. In elk geval, wie sê die sentours is reg? Dit klink vir my baie na fortuinvertellery en professor McGonagall het self gesê dis uiters onwetenskaplik.”

Dit het lig geword terwyl hulle praat. Doodmoeg en met seer kele gaan hulle bed toe. Maar die nag se verrassings is nog nie oor nie.

Toe Harry sy lakens terugtrek, lê sy onsigbaarheidsmantel netjies opgevou daaronder. Vasgesteek daaraan is 'n nota:

Net ingeval.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN



THROUGH THE TRAPDOOR

In years to come, Harry would never quite remember how he had managed to get through his exams when he half expected Voldemort to come bursting through the door at any moment. Yet the days crept by, and there could be no doubt that Fluffy was still alive and well behind the locked door.

It was sweltering hot, especially in the large classroom where they did their written papers. They had been given special, new quills for the exams, which had been bewitched with an Anti-Cheating spell.

They had practical exams as well. Professor Flitwick called them one by one into his class to see if they could make a pineapple tap-dance across a desk. Professor McGonagall watched them turn a mouse into a snuffbox — points were given for how pretty the snuffbox was, but taken away if it had whiskers. Snape made them all nervous, breathing down their necks while they tried to remember how to make a Forgetfulness potion.

Harry did the best he could, trying to ignore the stabbing pains in his forehead, which had been bothering him ever since his trip into the forest. Neville thought Harry had a bad case of exam nerves because Harry couldn't sleep, but the truth was that Harry kept being woken by his old nightmare, except that it was now worse than ever because there was a hooded figure dripping blood in it.

Maybe it was because they hadn't seen what Harry had seen in the forest, or because they didn't have scars burning on their foreheads, but Ron and Hermione didn't seem as worried about the Stone as

Harry. The idea of Voldemort certainly scared them, but he didn't keep visiting them in dreams, and they were so busy with their studying they didn't have much time to fret about what Snape or anyone else might be up to.

Their very last exam was History of Magic. One hour of answering questions about batty old wizards who'd invented self-stirring cauldrons and they'd be free, free for a whole wonderful week until their exam results came out. When the ghost of Professor Binns told them to put down their quills and roll up their parchment, Harry couldn't help cheering with the rest.

"That was far easier than I thought it would be," said Hermione as they joined the crowds flocking out onto the sunny grounds. "I needn't have learned about the 1637 Werewolf Code of Conduct or the uprising of Elfric the Eager."

Hermione always liked to go through their exam papers afterward, but Ron said this made him feel ill, so they wandered down to the lake and flopped under a tree. The Weasley twins and Lee Jordan were tickling the tentacles of a giant squid, which was basking in the warm shallows.

"No more studying," Ron sighed happily, stretching out on the grass. "You could look more cheerful, Harry, we've got a week before we find out how badly we've done, there's no need to worry yet."

Harry was rubbing his forehead.

"I wish I knew what this *means!*" he burst out angrily. "My scar keeps hurting — it's happened before, but never as often as this."

"Go to Madam Pomfrey," Hermione suggested.

“I’m not ill,” said Harry. “I think it’s a warning . . . it means danger’s coming. . . .”

Ron couldn’t get worked up, it was too hot.

“Harry, relax, Hermione’s right, the Stone’s safe as long as Dumbledore’s around. Anyway, we’ve never had any proof Snape found out how to get past Fluffy. He nearly had his leg ripped off once, he’s not going to try it again in a hurry. And Neville will play Quidditch for England before Hagrid lets Dumbledore down.”

Harry nodded, but he couldn’t shake off a lurking feeling that there was something he’d forgotten to do, something important. When he tried to explain this, Hermione said, “That’s just the exams. I woke up last night and was halfway through my Transfiguration notes before I remembered we’d done that one.”

Harry was quite sure the unsettled feeling didn’t have anything to do with work, though. He watched an owl flutter toward the school across the bright blue sky, a note clamped in its mouth. Hagrid was the only one who ever sent him letters. Hagrid would never betray Dumbledore. Hagrid would never tell anyone how to get past Fluffy . . . never . . . but —

Harry suddenly jumped to his feet.

“Where’re you going?” said Ron sleepily.

“I’ve just thought of something,” said Harry. He had turned white. “We’ve got to go and see Hagrid, now.”

“Why?” panted Hermione, hurrying to keep up.

“Don’t you think it’s a bit odd,” said Harry, scrambling up the grassy slope, “that what Hagrid wants more than anything else is a dragon, and a stranger turns up who just happens to have an egg in his

pocket? How many people wander around with dragon eggs if it's against wizard law? Lucky they found Hagrid, don't you think? Why didn't I see it before?"

"What are you talking about?" said Ron, but Harry, sprinting across the grounds toward the forest, didn't answer.

Hagrid was sitting in an armchair outside his house; his trousers and sleeves were rolled up, and he was shelling peas into a large bowl.

"Hullo," he said, smiling. "Finished yer exams? Got time fer a drink?"

"Yes, please," said Ron, but Harry cut him off.

"No, we're in a hurry. Hagrid, I've got to ask you something. You know that night you won Norbert? What did the stranger you were playing cards with look like?"

"Dunno," said Hagrid casually, "he wouldn't take his cloak off."

He saw the three of them look stunned and raised his eyebrows.

"It's not that unusual, yeh get a lot o' funny folk in the Hog's Head — that's one o' the pubs down in the village. Mighta bin a dragon dealer, mightn' he? I never saw his face, he kept his hood up."

Harry sank down next to the bowl of peas.

"What did you talk to him about, Hagrid? Did you mention Hogwarts at all?"

"Mighta come up," said Hagrid, frowning as he tried to remember.

"Yeah . . . he asked what I did, an' I told him I was gamekeeper here. . . . He asked a bit about the sorta creatures I look after . . . so I told him . . . an' I said what I'd always really wanted was a dragon . . . an' then . . . I can't remember too well, 'cause he kept

buyin' me drinks. . . . Let's see . . . yeah, then he said he had the dragon egg an' we could play cards fer it if I wanted . . . but he had ter be sure I could handle it, he didn' want it ter go ter any old home. . . . So I told him, after Fluffy, a dragon would be easy. . . .”

“And did he — did he seem interested in Fluffy?” Harry asked, trying to keep his voice calm.

“Well — yeah — how many three-headed dogs d'yeh meet, even around Hogwarts? So I told him, Fluffy's a piece o' cake if yeh know how to calm him down, jus' play him a bit o' music an' he'll go straight off ter sleep —”

Hagrid suddenly looked horrified.

“I shouldn'ta told yeh that!” he blurted out. “Forget I said it! Hey — where're yeh goin'?”

Harry, Ron, and Hermione didn't speak to each other at all until they came to a halt in the entrance hall, which seemed very cold and gloomy after the grounds.

“We've got to go to Dumbledore,” said Harry. “Hagrid told that stranger how to get past Fluffy, and it was either Snape or Voldemort under that cloak — it must've been easy, once he'd got Hagrid drunk. I just hope Dumbledore believes us. Firenze might back us up if Bane doesn't stop him. Where's Dumbledore's office?”

They looked around, as if hoping to see a sign pointing them in the right direction. They had never been told where Dumbledore lived, nor did they know anyone who had been sent to see him.

“We'll just have to —” Harry began, but a voice suddenly rang across the hall.

“What are you three doing inside?”

It was Professor McGonagall, carrying a large pile of books.

“We want to see Professor Dumbledore,” said Hermione, rather bravely, Harry and Ron thought.

“See Professor Dumbledore?” Professor McGonagall repeated, as though this was a very fishy thing to want to do. “Why?”

Harry swallowed — now what?

“It’s sort of secret,” he said, but he wished at once he hadn’t, because Professor McGonagall’s nostrils flared.

“Professor Dumbledore left ten minutes ago,” she said coldly. “He received an urgent owl from the Ministry of Magic and flew off for London at once.”

“He’s *gone*?” said Harry frantically. “*Now*?”

“Professor Dumbledore is a very great wizard, Potter, he has many demands on his time —”

“But this is important.”

“Something you have to say is more important than the Ministry of Magic, Potter?”

“Look,” said Harry, throwing caution to the winds, “Professor — it’s about the Sorcerer’s Stone —”

Whatever Professor McGonagall had expected, it wasn’t that. The books she was carrying tumbled out of her arms, but she didn’t pick them up.

“How do you know — ?” she spluttered.

“Professor, I think — I *know* — that Sn — that someone’s going to try and steal the Stone. I’ve got to talk to Professor Dumbledore.”

She eyed him with a mixture of shock and suspicion.

“Professor Dumbledore will be back tomorrow,” she said finally.

“I don’t know how you found out about the Stone, but rest assured, no one can possibly steal it, it’s too well protected.”

“But Professor —”

“Potter, I know what I’m talking about,” she said shortly. She bent down and gathered up the fallen books. “I suggest you all go back outside and enjoy the sunshine.”

But they didn’t.

“It’s tonight,” said Harry, once he was sure Professor McGonagall was out of earshot. “Snape’s going through the trapdoor tonight. He’s found out everything he needs, and now he’s got Dumbledore out of the way. He sent that note, I bet the Ministry of Magic will get a real shock when Dumbledore turns up.”

“But what can we —”

Hermione gasped. Harry and Ron wheeled round.

Snape was standing there.

“Good afternoon,” he said smoothly.

They stared at him.

“You shouldn’t be inside on a day like this,” he said, with an odd, twisted smile.

“We were —” Harry began, without any idea what he was going to say.

“You want to be more careful,” said Snape. “Hanging around like this, people will think you’re up to something. And Gryffindor really can’t afford to lose any more points, can it?”

Harry flushed. They turned to go outside, but Snape called them back.

“Be warned, Potter — any more nighttime wanderings and I will

personally make sure you are expelled. Good day to you.”

He strode off in the direction of the staffroom.

Out on the stone steps, Harry turned to the others.

“Right, here’s what we’ve got to do,” he whispered urgently. “One of us has got to keep an eye on Snape — wait outside the staffroom and follow him if he leaves it. Hermione, you’d better do that.”

“Why me?”

“It’s obvious,” said Ron. “You can pretend to be waiting for Professor Flitwick, you know.” He put on a high voice, ““Oh Professor Flitwick, I’m so worried, I think I got question fourteen *b* wrong. . . .””

“Oh, shut up,” said Hermione, but she agreed to go and watch out for Snape.

“And we’d better stay outside the third-floor corridor,” Harry told Ron. “Come on.”

But that part of the plan didn’t work. No sooner had they reached the door separating Fluffy from the rest of the school than Professor McGonagall turned up again and this time, she lost her temper.

“I suppose you think you’re harder to get past than a pack of enchantments!” she stormed. “Enough of this nonsense! If I hear you’ve come anywhere near here again, I’ll take another fifty points from Gryffindor! Yes, Weasley, from my own House!”

Harry and Ron went back to the common room. Harry had just said, “At least Hermione’s on Snape’s tail,” when the portrait of the Fat Lady swung open and Hermione came in.

“I’m sorry, Harry!” she wailed. “Snape came out and asked me what I was doing, so I said I was waiting for Flitwick, and Snape

went to get him, and I've only just got away, I don't know where Snape went."

"Well, that's it then, isn't it?" Harry said.

The other two stared at him. He was pale and his eyes were glittering.

"I'm going out of here tonight and I'm going to try and get to the Stone first."

"You're mad!" said Ron.

"You can't!" said Hermione. "After what McGonagall and Snape have said? You'll be expelled!"

"SO WHAT?" Harry shouted. "Don't you understand? If Snape gets hold of the Stone, Voldemort's coming back! Haven't you heard what it was like when he was trying to take over? There won't be any Hogwarts to get expelled from! He'll flatten it, or turn it into a school for the Dark Arts! Losing points doesn't matter anymore, can't you see? D'you think he'll leave you and your families alone if Gryffindor wins the House Cup? If I get caught before I can get to the Stone, well, I'll have to go back to the Dursleys and wait for Voldemort to find me there, it's only dying a bit later than I would have, because I'm never going over to the Dark Side! I'm going through that trapdoor tonight and nothing you two say is going to stop me! Voldemort killed my parents, remember?"

He glared at them.

"You're right, Harry," said Hermione in a small voice.

"I'll use the Invisibility Cloak," said Harry. "It's just lucky I got it back."

"But will it cover all three of us?" said Ron.

“All — all three of us?”

“Oh, come off it, you don’t think we’d let you go alone?”

“Of course not,” said Hermione briskly. “How do you think you’d get to the Stone without us? I’d better go and look through my books, there might be something useful. . . .”

“But if we get caught, you two will be expelled, too.”

“Not if I can help it,” said Hermione grimly. “Flitwick told me in secret that I got a hundred and twelve percent on his exam. They’re not throwing me out after that.”

After dinner the three of them sat nervously apart in the common room. Nobody bothered them; none of the Gryffindors had anything to say to Harry any more, after all. This was the first night he hadn’t been upset by it. Hermione was skimming through all her notes, hoping to come across one of the enchantments they were about to try to break. Harry and Ron didn’t talk much. Both of them were thinking about what they were about to do.

Slowly, the room emptied as people drifted off to bed.

“Better get the Cloak,” Ron muttered, as Lee Jordan finally left, stretching and yawning. Harry ran upstairs to their dark dormitory. He pulled out the Cloak and then his eyes fell on the flute Hagrid had given him for Christmas. He pocketed it to use on Fluffy — he didn’t feel much like singing.

He ran back down to the common room.

“We’d better put the Cloak on here, and make sure it covers all three of us — if Filch spots one of our feet wandering along on its own —”

“What are you doing?” said a voice from the corner of the room.

Neville appeared from behind an armchair, clutching Trevor the toad, who looked as though he'd been making another bid for freedom.

"Nothing, Neville, nothing," said Harry, hurriedly putting the Cloak behind his back.

Neville stared at their guilty faces.

"You're going out again," he said.

"No, no, no," said Hermione. "No, we're not. Why don't you go to bed, Neville?"

Harry looked at the grandfather clock by the door. They couldn't afford to waste any more time, Snape might even now be playing Fluffy to sleep.

"You can't go out," said Neville, "you'll be caught again. Gryffindor will be in even more trouble."

"You don't understand," said Harry, "this is important."

But Neville was clearly steeling himself to do something desperate.

"I won't let you do it," he said, hurrying to stand in front of the portrait hole. "I'll — I'll fight you!"

"*Neville*," Ron exploded, "get away from that hole and don't be an idiot —"

"Don't you call me an idiot!" said Neville. "I don't think you should be breaking any more rules! And you were the one who told me to stand up to people!"

"Yes, but not to *us*," said Ron in exasperation. "Neville, you don't know what you're doing."

He took a step forward and Neville dropped Trevor the toad, who leapt out of sight.

“Go on then, try and hit me!” said Neville, raising his fists. “I’m ready!”

Harry turned to Hermione.

“*Do something,*” he said desperately.

Hermione stepped forward.

“Neville,” she said, “I’m really, really sorry about this.”

She raised her wand.

“*Petrificus Totalus!*” she cried, pointing it at Neville.

Neville’s arms snapped to his sides. His legs sprang together. His whole body rigid, he swayed where he stood and then fell flat on his face, stiff as a board.

Hermione ran to turn him over. Neville’s jaws were jammed together so he couldn’t speak. Only his eyes were moving, looking at them in horror.

“What’ve you done to him?” Harry whispered.

“It’s the full Body-Bind,” said Hermione miserably. “Oh, Neville, I’m so sorry.”

“We had to, Neville, no time to explain,” said Harry.

“You’ll understand later, Neville,” said Ron as they stepped over him and pulled on the Invisibility Cloak.

But leaving Neville lying motionless on the floor didn’t feel like a very good omen. In their nervous state, every statue’s shadow looked like Filch, every distant breath of wind sounded like Peeves swooping down on them.

At the foot of the first set of stairs, they spotted Mrs. Norris skulking near the top.

“Oh, let’s kick her, just this once,” Ron whispered in Harry’s ear,

but Harry shook his head. As they climbed carefully around her, Mrs. Norris turned her lamplike eyes on them, but didn't do anything.

They didn't meet anyone else until they reached the staircase up to the third floor. Peeves was bobbing halfway up, loosening the carpet so that people would trip.

"Who's there?" he said suddenly as they climbed toward him. He narrowed his wicked black eyes. "Know you're there, even if I can't see you. Are you ghoulie or ghostie or wee student beastie?"

He rose up in the air and floated there, squinting at them.

"Should call Filch, I should, if something's a-creeping around unseen."

Harry had a sudden idea.

"Peeves," he said, in a hoarse whisper, "the Bloody Baron has his own reasons for being invisible."

Peeves almost fell out of the air in shock. He caught himself in time and hovered about a foot off the stairs.

"So sorry, your bloodiness, Mr. Baron, sir," he said greasily. "My mistake, my mistake — I didn't see you — of course I didn't, you're invisible — forgive old Peevsie his little joke, sir."

"I have business here, Peeves," croaked Harry. "Stay away from this place tonight."

"I will, sir, I most certainly will," said Peeves, rising up in the air again. "Hope your business goes well, Baron, I'll not bother you."

And he scooted off.

"*Brilliant*, Harry!" whispered Ron.

A few seconds later, they were there, outside the third-floor corridor — and the door was already ajar.

“Well, there you are,” Harry said quietly, “Snape’s already got past Fluffy.”

Seeing the open door somehow seemed to impress upon all three of them what was facing them. Underneath the Cloak, Harry turned to the other two.

“If you want to go back, I won’t blame you,” he said. “You can take the Cloak, I won’t need it now.”

“Don’t be stupid,” said Ron.

“We’re coming,” said Hermione.

Harry pushed the door open.

As the door creaked, low, rumbling growls met their ears. All three of the dog’s noses sniffed madly in their direction, even though it couldn’t see them.

“What’s that at its feet?” Hermione whispered.

“Looks like a harp,” said Ron. “Snape must have left it there.”

“It must wake up the moment you stop playing,” said Harry. “Well, here goes . . .”

He put Hagrid’s flute to his lips and blew. It wasn’t really a tune, but from the first note the beast’s eyes began to droop. Harry hardly drew breath. Slowly, the dog’s growls ceased — it tottered on its paws and fell to its knees, then it slumped to the ground, fast asleep.

“Keep playing,” Ron warned Harry as they slipped out of the Cloak and crept toward the trapdoor. They could feel the dog’s hot, smelly breath as they approached the giant heads.

“I think we’ll be able to pull the door open,” said Ron, peering over the dog’s back. “Want to go first, Hermione?”

“No, I don’t!”

“All right.” Ron gritted his teeth and stepped carefully over the dog’s legs. He bent and pulled the ring of the trapdoor, which swung up and open.

“What can you see?” Hermione said anxiously.

“Nothing — just black — there’s no way of climbing down, we’ll just have to drop.”

Harry, who was still playing the flute, waved at Ron to get his attention and pointed at himself.

“You want to go first? Are you sure?” said Ron. “I don’t know how deep this thing goes. Give the flute to Hermione so she can keep him asleep.”

Harry handed the flute over. In the few seconds’ silence, the dog growled and twitched, but the moment Hermione began to play, it fell back into its deep sleep.

Harry climbed over it and looked down through the trapdoor. There was no sign of the bottom.

He lowered himself through the hole until he was hanging on by his fingertips. Then he looked up at Ron and said, “If anything happens to me, don’t follow. Go straight to the owlery and send Hedwig to Dumbledore, right?”

“Right,” said Ron.

“See you in a minute, I hope. . . .”

And Harry let go. Cold, damp air rushed past him as he fell down, down, down and —

FLUMP. With a funny, muffled sort of thump he landed on something soft. He sat up and felt around, his eyes not used to the gloom. It felt as though he was sitting on some sort of plant.

“It’s okay!” he called up to the light the size of a postage stamp, which was the open trapdoor, “it’s a soft landing, you can jump!”

Ron followed right away. He landed, sprawled next to Harry.

“What’s this stuff?” were his first words.

“Dunno, some sort of plant thing. I suppose it’s here to break the fall. Come on, Hermione!”

The distant music stopped. There was a loud bark from the dog, but Hermione had already jumped. She landed on Harry’s other side.

“We must be miles under the school,” she said.

“Lucky this plant thing’s here, really,” said Ron.

“*Lucky!*” shrieked Hermione. “Look at you both!”

She leapt up and struggled toward a damp wall. She had to struggle because the moment she had landed, the plant had started to twist snakelike tendrils around her ankles. As for Harry and Ron, their legs had already been bound tightly in long creepers without their noticing.

Hermione had managed to free herself before the plant got a firm grip on her. Now she watched in horror as the two boys fought to pull the plant off them, but the more they strained against it, the tighter and faster the plant wound around them.

“Stop moving!” Hermione ordered them. “I know what this is — it’s Devil’s Snare!”

“Oh, I’m so glad we know what it’s called, that’s a great help,” snarled Ron, leaning back, trying to stop the plant from curling around his neck.

“Shut up, I’m trying to remember how to kill it!” said Hermione.

“Well, hurry up, I can’t breathe!” Harry gasped, wrestling with it

as it curled around his chest.

“Devil’s Snare, Devil’s Snare . . . what did Professor Sprout say? — it likes the dark and the damp —”

“So light a fire!” Harry choked.

“Yes — of course — but there’s no wood!” Hermione cried, wringing her hands.

“HAVE YOU GONE MAD?” Ron bellowed. “ARE YOU A WITCH OR NOT?”

“Oh, right!” said Hermione, and she whipped out her wand, waved it, muttered something, and sent a jet of the same bluebell flames she had used on Snape at the plant. In a matter of seconds, the two boys felt it loosening its grip as it cringed away from the light and warmth. Wriggling and flailing, it unraveled itself from their bodies, and they were able to pull free.

“Lucky you pay attention in Herbology, Hermione,” said Harry as he joined her by the wall, wiping sweat off his face.

“Yeah,” said Ron, “and lucky Harry doesn’t lose his head in a crisis — ‘there’s no wood,’ *honestly*.”

“This way,” said Harry, pointing down a stone passageway, which was the only way forward.

All they could hear apart from their footsteps was the gentle drip of water trickling down the walls. The passageway sloped downward, and Harry was reminded of Gringotts. With an unpleasant jolt of the heart, he remembered the dragons said to be guarding vaults in the wizards’ bank. If they met a dragon, a fully-grown dragon — Norbert had been bad enough . . .

“Can you hear something?” Ron whispered.

Harry listened. A soft rustling and clinking seemed to be coming from up ahead.

“Do you think it’s a ghost?”

“I don’t know . . . sounds like wings to me.”

“There’s light ahead — I can see something moving.”

They reached the end of the passageway and saw before them a brilliantly lit chamber, its ceiling arching high above them. It was full of small, jewel-bright birds, fluttering and tumbling all around the room. On the opposite side of the chamber was a heavy wooden door.

“Do you think they’ll attack us if we cross the room?” said Ron.

“Probably,” said Harry. “They don’t look very vicious, but I suppose if they all swooped down at once . . . well, there’s no other choice . . . I’ll run.”

He took a deep breath, covered his face with his arms, and sprinted across the room. He expected to feel sharp beaks and claws tearing at him any second, but nothing happened. He reached the door untouched. He pulled the handle, but it was locked.

The other two followed him. They tugged and heaved at the door, but it wouldn’t budge, not even when Hermione tried her Alohomora Charm.

“Now what?” said Ron.

“These birds . . . they can’t be here just for decoration,” said Hermione.

They watched the birds soaring overhead, glittering — *glittering?*

“They’re not birds!” Harry said suddenly. “They’re *keys*! Winged keys — look carefully. So that must mean . . .” he looked around the

chamber while the other two squinted up at the flock of keys. “. . . yes — look! Broomsticks! We’ve got to catch the key to the door!”

“But there are *hundreds* of them!”

Ron examined the lock on the door.

“We’re looking for a big, old-fashioned one — probably silver, like the handle.”

They each seized a broomstick and kicked off into the air, soaring into the midst of the cloud of keys. They grabbed and snatched, but the bewitched keys darted and dived so quickly it was almost impossible to catch one.

Not for nothing, though, was Harry the youngest Seeker in a century. He had a knack for spotting things other people didn’t. After a minute’s weaving about through the whirl of rainbow feathers, he noticed a large silver key that had a bent wing, as if it had already been caught and stuffed roughly into the keyhole.

“That one!” he called to the others. “That big one — there — no, there — with bright blue wings — the feathers are all crumpled on one side.”

Ron went speeding in the direction that Harry was pointing, crashed into the ceiling, and nearly fell off his broom.

“We’ve got to close in on it!” Harry called, not taking his eyes off the key with the damaged wing. “Ron, you come at it from above — Hermione, stay below and stop it from going down — and I’ll try and catch it. Right, NOW!”

Ron dived, Hermione rocketed upward, the key dodged them both, and Harry streaked after it; it sped toward the wall, Harry leaned forward and with a nasty, crunching noise, pinned it against the stone

with one hand. Ron and Hermione's cheers echoed around the high chamber.

They landed quickly, and Harry ran to the door, the key struggling in his hand. He rammed it into the lock and turned — it worked. The moment the lock had clicked open, the key took flight again, looking very battered now that it had been caught twice.

“Ready?” Harry asked the other two, his hand on the door handle. They nodded. He pulled the door open.

The next chamber was so dark they couldn't see anything at all. But as they stepped into it, light suddenly flooded the room to reveal an astonishing sight.

They were standing on the edge of a huge chessboard, behind the black chessmen, which were all taller than they were and carved from what looked like black stone. Facing them, way across the chamber, were the white pieces. Harry, Ron and Hermione shivered slightly — the towering white chessmen had no faces.

“Now what do we do?” Harry whispered.

“It's obvious, isn't it?” said Ron. “We've got to play our way across the room.”

Behind the white pieces they could see another door.

“How?” said Hermione nervously.

“I think,” said Ron, “we're going to have to be chessmen.”

He walked up to a black knight and put his hand out to touch the knight's horse. At once, the stone sprang to life. The horse pawed the ground and the knight turned his helmeted head to look down at Ron.

“Do we — er — have to join you to get across?”

The black knight nodded. Ron turned to the other two.

“This needs thinking about. . . .” he said. “I suppose we’ve got to take the place of three of the black pieces. . . .”

Harry and Hermione stayed quiet, watching Ron think. Finally he said, “Now, don’t be offended or anything, but neither of you are that good at chess —”

“We’re not offended,” said Harry quickly. “Just tell us what to do.”

“Well, Harry, you take the place of that bishop, and Hermione, you go there instead of that castle.”

“What about you?”

“I’m going to be a knight,” said Ron.

The chessmen seemed to have been listening, because at these words a knight, a bishop, and a castle turned their backs on the white pieces and walked off the board, leaving three empty squares that Harry, Ron, and Hermione took.

“White always plays first in chess,” said Ron, peering across the board. “Yes . . . look . . .”

A white pawn had moved forward two squares.

Ron started to direct the black pieces. They moved silently wherever he sent them. Harry’s knees were trembling. What if they lost?

“Harry — move diagonally four squares to the right.”

Their first real shock came when their other knight was taken. The white queen smashed him to the floor and dragged him off the board, where he lay quite still, facedown.

“Had to let that happen,” said Ron, looking shaken. “Leaves you free to take that bishop, Hermione, go on.”

Every time one of their men was lost, the white pieces showed no mercy. Soon there was a huddle of limp black players slumped along the wall. Twice, Ron only just noticed in time that Harry and Hermione were in danger. He himself darted around the board, taking almost as many white pieces as they had lost black ones.

“We’re nearly there,” he muttered suddenly. “Let me think — let me think . . .”

The white queen turned her blank face toward him.

“Yes . . .” said Ron softly, “it’s the only way . . . I’ve got to be taken.”

“NO!” Harry and Hermione shouted.

“That’s chess!” snapped Ron. “You’ve got to make some sacrifices! I’ll make my move and she’ll take me — that leaves you free to checkmate the king, Harry!”

“But —”

“Do you want to stop Snape or not?”

“Ron —”

“Look, if you don’t hurry up, he’ll already have the Stone!”

There was no alternative.

“Ready?” Ron called, his face pale but determined. “Here I go — now, don’t hang around once you’ve won.”

He stepped forward, and the white queen pounced. She struck Ron hard across the head with her stone arm, and he crashed to the floor — Hermione screamed but stayed on her square — the white queen dragged Ron to one side. He looked as if he’d been knocked out.

Shaking, Harry moved three spaces to the left.

The white king took off his crown and threw it at Harry’s feet.

They had won. The chessmen parted and bowed, leaving the door ahead clear. With one last desperate look back at Ron, Harry and Hermione charged through the door and up the next passageway.

“What if he’s — ?”

“He’ll be all right,” said Harry, trying to convince himself. “What do you reckon’s next?”

“We’ve had Sprout’s, that was the Devil’s Snare; Flitwick must’ve put charms on the keys; McGonagall transfigured the chessmen to make them alive; that leaves Quirrell’s spell, and Snape’s . . .”

They had reached another door.

“All right?” Harry whispered.

“Go on.”

Harry pushed it open.

A disgusting smell filled their nostrils, making both of them pull their robes up over their noses. Eyes watering, they saw, flat on the floor in front of them, a troll even larger than the one they had tackled, out cold with a bloody lump on its head.

“I’m glad we didn’t have to fight that one,” Harry whispered as they stepped carefully over one of its massive legs. “Come on, I can’t breathe.”

He pulled open the next door, both of them hardly daring to look at what came next — but there was nothing very frightening in here, just a table with seven differently shaped bottles standing on it in a line.

“Snape’s,” said Harry. “What do we have to do?”

They stepped over the threshold, and immediately a fire sprang up behind them in the doorway. It wasn’t ordinary fire either; it was purple. At the same instant, black flames shot up in the doorway

leading onward. They were trapped.

“Look!” Hermione seized a roll of paper lying next to the bottles. Harry looked over her shoulder to read it:

*Danger lies before you, while safety lies behind,
Two of us will help you, whichever you would find,
One among us seven will let you move ahead,
Another will transport the drinker back instead,
Two among our number hold only nettle wine,
Three of us are killers, waiting hidden in line.
Choose, unless you wish to stay here forevermore,
To help you in your choice, we give you these clues four:
First, however slyly the poison tries to hide
You will always find some on nettle wine's left side;
Second, different are those who stand at either end,
But if you would move onward, neither is your friend;
Third, as you see clearly, all are different size,
Neither dwarf nor giant holds death in their insides;
Fourth, the second left and the second on the right
Are twins once you taste them, though different at first sight.*

Hermione let out a great sigh and Harry, amazed, saw that she was smiling, the very last thing he felt like doing.

“Brilliant,” said Hermione. “This isn’t magic — it’s logic — a puzzle. A lot of the greatest wizards haven’t got an ounce of logic, they’d be stuck in here forever.”

“But so will we, won’t we?”

“Of course not,” said Hermione. “Everything we need is here on

this paper. Seven bottles: three are poison; two are wine; one will get us safely through the black fire, and one will get us back through the purple.”

“But how do we know which to drink?”

“Give me a minute.”

Hermione read the paper several times. Then she walked up and down the line of bottles, muttering to herself and pointing at them. At last, she clapped her hands.

“Got it,” she said. “The smallest bottle will get us through the black fire — toward the Stone.”

Harry looked at the tiny bottle.

“There’s only enough there for one of us,” he said. “That’s hardly one swallow.”

They looked at each other.

“Which one will get you back through the purple flames?”

Hermione pointed at a rounded bottle at the right end of the line.

“You drink that,” said Harry. “No, listen, get back and get Ron. Grab brooms from the flying-key room, they’ll get you out of the trapdoor and past Fluffy — go straight to the owlery and send Hedwig to Dumbledore, we need him. I might be able to hold Snape off for a while, but I’m no match for him, really.”

“But Harry — what if You-Know-Who’s with him?”

“Well — I was lucky once, wasn’t I?” said Harry, pointing at his scar. “I might get lucky again.”

Hermione’s lip trembled, and she suddenly dashed at Harry and threw her arms around him.

“Hermione!”

“Harry — you’re a great wizard, you know.”

“I’m not as good as you,” said Harry, very embarrassed, as she let go of him.

“Me!” said Hermione. “Books! And cleverness! There are more important things — friendship and bravery and — oh Harry — be *careful!*”

“You drink first,” said Harry. “You are sure which is which, aren’t you?”

“Positive,” said Hermione. She took a long drink from the round bottle at the end, and shuddered.

“It’s not poison?” said Harry anxiously.

“No — but it’s like ice.”

“Quick, go, before it wears off.”

“Good luck — take care —”

“GO!”

Hermione turned and walked straight through the purple fire.

Harry took a deep breath and picked up the smallest bottle. He turned to face the black flames.

“Here I come,” he said, and he drained the little bottle in one gulp.

It was indeed as though ice was flooding his body. He put the bottle down and walked forward; he braced himself, saw the black flames licking his body, but couldn’t feel them — for a moment he could see nothing but dark fire — then he was on the other side, in the last chamber.

There was already someone there — but it wasn’t Snape. It wasn’t even Voldemort.

Deur die Valdeur

Jare later kon Harry nie sê hoe hy dit reggekry het om eksamen te skryf, terwyl hy half verwag dat Woldemort enige oomblik by die deur gaan inbars nie. Tog kruip die dae verby en dit is duidelik dat Wollie nog steeds op sy pos agter die geslote deur is.

Dit is verstikkend warm, veral in die groot klaskamer waar hulle eksamen skryf. Hulle het spesiale nuwe veerpenne waaroor 'n anti-afskryf-towerspreuk uitgespreek is, vir die eksamen gekry.

Daar is ook praktiese eksamens. Professor Flickerpitt roep hulle eenen vorentoe om te kyk of hulle 'n pynappel oor sy tafel kan laat klop-dans. Professor McGonagall laat hulle 'n muis in 'n snuifdoos verander – hulle kry punte vir hoe mooi die snuifdoos is, maar daar word punte afgetrek as dit snorbaarde het. Snerp maak almal senuweeagtig. Hy leun oor hulle terwyl hulle probeer onthou hoe om 'n towerdrankie teen Vergeetagtigheid te maak.

Harry doen sy bes om nie aan die kloppende pyn in sy voorkop te dink nie. Dit pla hom al van die nag in die woud af. Neville reken dat Harry 'n aanval van eksamenkoors het en daarom nie kan slaap nie, maar dis Harry se ou nagmerrie wat hom wakker hou, behalwe dat dit nou erger is, want nou droom hy ook van 'n figuur in 'n mantel vol van druppende bloed.

Dalk is dit omdat hulle nie gesien het wat Harry in die woud gesien het nie, of omdat hulle nie pynlike littekens op hul voorkop het nie, maar Ron en Hermien lyk nie so bekommerd oor die Steen as Harry nie. Die gedagte aan Woldemort maak hulle beslis ook bang, maar hy verskyn nie in hul drome nie en hulle is so besig om te hersien dat hulle nie tyd het om hulle oor Snerp of enigiemand anders se doen en late te bekommer nie.

Die heel laaste vraestel is die Geskiedenis van die Toorkuns. Nog net een uur van vroe beantwoord oor in-die-bol-gepikte ou towenaars wat selfroer-hekseketels ontwikkel het, en hulle is vry, vry vir 'n hele wonderlike week tot hulle hul punte kry. Toe die spook van professor Binns sê hulle moet hul veerpenne neersit en hul perkamente oprol, kan Harry nie anders as om saam met die res te juig nie.

“Dit was baie makliker as wat ek verwag het,” sê Hermien toe hulle saam met die ander studente na die sonnige terrein stroom. “Ek het die Weerwolf-Gedragskode van 1637 heeltemal verniet geleer en so ook die opstand van Elfric die Yweraar.”

Hermien hou daarvan om na die tyd deur die vraestel te gaan, maar Ron sê dit maak hom naer, dus stap hulle na die meer en gaan lê onder ’n boom. Die Weasley-tweeling en Lee Jordaan is besig om ’n reuse-inkvis wat in die warm vlak water lê, se tentakels te kielie.

“Niks meer hersiening nie.” Ron sug tevrede en strek hom uit op die gras. “Jy mag maar vroliker lyk, Harry, daar’s ’n hele week voor ons weet hoe sleg ons gedoen het; dit help nie om jou nou al daaroor te bekommer nie.”

Harry vryf sy voorkop.

“Ek wens ek weet wat dit beteken!” bars hy uit. “Die litteken is gedurig seer – dit het al voorheen gebeur, maar nog nooit so dikwels soos nou nie.”

“Gaan na Madame Pomfrey,” stel Hermien voor.

“Ek is nie siek nie,” sê Harry. “Ek dink dis ’n waarskuwing . . . dit beteken daar’s gevaar iewers . . .”

Ron kan hom nie daaroor opwerk nie, dis te warm.

“Harry, ontspan, Hermien is reg, die Steen is veilig solank Dompeldorius in die rondte is. In elk geval, ons het geen bewyse dat Snerp weet hoe om verby Wollie te kom nie. Sy been is al een keer amper afgeskeur, hy sal nie gou weer probeer nie. En Neville sal vir Engeland Kwiddiek speel voor Hagrid vir Dompeldorius in die steek sal laat.”

Harry knik, maar hy kan die gevoel dat hy iets vergeet het, iets belangriks, net nie afskud nie. Toe hy dit probeer verduidelik, sê Hermien, “Dis oor die eksamen. Ek het laas nag wakker geword en was halfpad deur my Transfigurasie-aantekeninge voor ek onthou het dat ons klaar is daarmee.”

Harry is heeltemal seker dat die snaakse gevoel niks met skoolwerk te doen het nie. Hy kyk hoe ’n uil met ’n briefie in sy snawel deur die blou lug skool toe vlieg. Hagrid is die enigste een wat ooit vir hom briefies stuur. Hagrid sal nooit vir Dompeldorius verrai nie. Hagrid sal nooit vir iemand vertel hoe om verby Wollie te kom nie . . . nooit nie . . . behalwe as –

Meteens spring Harry regop.

“Waarheen gaan jy?” vra Ron slaperig.

“Ek het nou net aan iets gedink,” sê Harry. Hy is wit in die gesig. “Ons moet vir Hagrid gaan sien, nou dadelik.”

“Hoekom?” vra Hermien en sy jaag om by te hou.

“Dink julle nie dis snaaks,” sê Harry terwyl hy teen die grasbedekte skuinste uitklouter, “dat dit wat Hagrid die graagste wil hê, ’n draak is,

nê, en dat 'n wildvreemde man skielik opdaag met 'n eier in sy sak nie? Hoeveel mense loop met drake-eiers rond? Dis teen die towenaarswette! Dis omtrent 'n geluk dat hy vir Hagrid ontmoet het, of wat sê julle? Hoe kom het ek nie al lankal hieraan gedink nie?"

"Wat praat jy tog?" sê Ron, maar Harry antwoord hom nie en nael reeds oor die terrein in die rigting van die woud.

Hagrid sit in 'n leunstoel net buite sy huis; sy broekspype en moue is opgerol en hy is besig om ertjies uit te dop.

"Hallo," sê hy en glimlag. "Klaar met die eksamen? Lus vir iets om te drink?"

"Ja, asseblief," sê Ron, maar Harry val hom in die rede.

"Nee, ons is haastig. Hagrid, ek moet jou iets vra. Onthou jy nog toe jy vir Norbert gewen het? Hoe het die man teen wie jy gespeel het, gelyk?"

"Weet nie," sê Hagrid rustig. "Hy't nie die kap van sy mantel afgehaal nie."

Hy sien hoe verbyster die drie na hom staar en hy lig sy wenkbroue.

"Dis nie juis ongewoon nie, daar's baie eienaardige mense in die Swynenes – dis die kroeg in die dorp. Was dalk 'n draakhandelaar, wie weet? Ek't nooit sy gesig gesien nie, hy't nie sy kap afgehaal nie."

Harry gaan sit langs die bak vol ertjies.

"Waaroor het jy met hom gepraat, Hagrid? Het jy enigiets oor Hogwarts gesê?"

"Het dalk," sê Hagrid en frons soos hy probeer onthou. "Ja . . . hy wou weet wat ek doen, toe sê ek ek's die boswagter hier . . . toe vra hy 'n bietjie uit oor al die diere waarna ek moet kyk . . . toe sê ek vir hom . . . dat ek nog altyd 'n draak wou hê . . . en toe . . . ek onthou nie so mooi nie, want hy't aanhou drankies koop . . . Laa'k sien, ja, toe sê hy hy't 'n draakeier en ons kan kaart speel daarvoor as ek dit wil hê . . . maar ek moet seker wees ek kan daarna kyk, hy wil nie hê dit moet na enige soort huis gaan nie. Toe sê ek, na Wollie is 'n draak kinderspeletjies . . ."

"En was hy – het hy uitgevra oor Wollie?" vra Harry en probeer sy stem kalm hou.

"Wel – ja – hoeveel driekoppige honde het jy al gesien, selfs hier by Hogwarts? Toe sê ek vir hom Wollie is 'n lammetjie as jy weet wat om te doen . . . speel net 'n stukkie musiek en hy raak aan die slaap –"

Skielik lyk Hagrid tot die dood toe benoud.

"Ek moes dit nie vir julle gesê het nie!" kerm hy. "Vergeet wat ek gesê het! Haai – waarheen gaan julle?"

Harry, Ron en Hermien praat eers met mekaar toe hulle tot stilstand kom in die voorportaal, wat baie koud en somber is na die sonnige speelgrond.

"Ons moet na Dompeldorius toe gaan," sê Harry. "Hagrid het vir daar-

die man gesê hoe om verby Wollie te kom en dit was óf Snerp óf Woldemort onder daardie mantel – dit moet maklik gewees het toe Hagrid eers dronk was. Ek hoop net Dompeldorius glo ons. Firenze sal dalk aan ons kant wees as Belladonna hom net sal toelaat. Waar is Dompeldorius se kantoor tog?”

Hulle kyk rond asof hulle hoop om iewers 'n bordjie te sien wat die rigting aandui. Niemand het nog ooit vir hulle gesê waar Dompeldorius woon nie en hulle weet nie van iemand wat al ooit na hom gestuur is nie.

“Ons sal net eenvoudig –” begin Harry, maar 'n stem weerklink skielik deur die voorportaal.

“Wat maak julle drie hier binne?”

Dit is professor McGonagall en sy dra 'n yslike stapel boeke.

“Ons moet vir professor Dompeldorius sien,” sê Hermien dapper, of so dink Harry en Ron.

“Vir professor Dompeldorius?” herhaal professor McGonagall asof dit 'n baie vreemde versoek is. “Hoekom?”

Harry sluk – wat nou?

“Dis soort van 'n geheim,” sê hy, maar wens dadelik dat hy dit nie gesê het nie, want professor McGonagall se neusvleuels rek wyd.

“Professor Dompeldorius is tien minute gelede hier weg,” sê sy koud. “Hy het 'n dringende uil van die Ministerie van Towerkuns ontvang en het dadelik Londen toe gevlieg.”

“Hy's weg?” vra Harry verskrik. “Nou?”

“Professor Dompeldorius is 'n baie belangrike towenaar, Potter, daar is baie aansprake op sy tyd.”

“Maar dit is belangrik.”

“Iets wat jy wil sê, is belangriker as die Ministerie vir Towerkuns, Potter?”

“Kyk hier,” sê Harry en nou is hy glad nie meer geheimsinnig nie, “professor – dit gaan oor die Towenaarsteen –”

Professor McGonagall het dit nie verwag nie. Die boeke wat sy dra, tuimel uit haar arms, maar sy tel hulle nie op nie.

“Hoe weet jy – ?” stotter sy.

“Professor, ek dink – ek weet – dat Sn – dat iemand die Steen wil steel. Ek moet met professor Dompeldorius daaroor praat.”

Sy gluur hom aan met 'n mengsel van skok en agterdog.

“Professor Dompeldorius sal môre terug wees,” sê sy uiteindelik. “Ek weet nie hoe jy van die Steen kan weet nie, maar wees gerus, niemand kan dit steel nie, dit word te goed beskerm.”

“Maar professor –”

“Potter, ek weet waarvan ek praat,” sê sy kortaf. Sy buk en tel die boeke op. “Ek stel voor dat julle al drie buitentoe gaan en die sonskyn geniet.”

Hulle doen dit nie.

“Dis vannag,” sê Harry, toe hy seker is dat professor McGonagall buite hoorafstand is. “Snerp gaan vannag deur daardie valdeur klim. Hy weet alles wat hy nodig het, en nou is Dompeldorius ook nog uit die pad. Hy het daardie briefie gestuur. Ek wed die Ministerie van Towerkuns skrik hulle boeglam as Dompeldorius daar opdaag.”

“Maar wat kan ons –”

Hermien snak na asem. Harry en Ron tol op hul hakke.

Dis Snerp wat daar staan.

“Goeienaand,” sê hy gladweg.

Hulle staar na hom.

“Julle moenie binne wees op so ’n mooi dag nie,” sê hy met ’n snaakse, skewe laggie.

“Ons wil net –” begin Harry, hoewel hy nie ’n idee het wat om te sê nie.

“Julle moet versigtiger wees,” sê Snerp. “As julle so rondstaan, sal mense dink dat julle kатtekwaad beplan. En Griffindor kan werklik nie bekostig om nog punte te verloor nie, of hoe?”

Harry bloos. Hulle draai om uit te stap, maar Snerp roep hulle terug.

“Wees gewaarsku, Potter – enige verdere nagtelike omswerwings en ek sal persoonlik seker maak dat jy geskors word. Tot siens.”

Hy kies koers in die rigting van die personeelkamer.

Buite op die kliptrappe draai Harry na sy maats.

“Reg, dis wat ons gaan doen,” fluister hy dringend. “Een van ons moet ’n ogie op Snerp hou – buite die personeelkamer wag en hom volg wanneer hy uitkom. Hermien, jy sal dit moet doen.”

“Hoekom ek?”

“Dis tog logies,” sê Ron. “Jy kan maak of jy vir professor Flickerpitt wag, sien.” Hy sê in ’n hoë stemmetjie, “O, professor Flickerpitt, ek is so bekommerd, ek dink ek het vraag veertien (b) verkeerd beantwoord en . . .”

“Ag, hou jou snater,” sê Hermien, maar sy stem in om Snerp dop te hou.

“Ons moet buite die gang op die derde verdieping gaan wag,” sê Harry vir Ron. “Komaan.”

Daardie deel van die plan werk egter nie. Hulle het skaars by die deur gekom wat Wollie van die res van die skool af weghou, of professor McGonagall daag op en hierdie keer verloor sy haar humeur behoorlik.

“Ek veronderstel julle dink dis moeiliker om verby julle te kom as verby ’n hele stel towerspreuke,” raas sy. “Ek het genoeg gehad van hierdie bog! As ek moet hoor dat julle weer hier rond was, trek ek nog vyftig punte van Griffindor af! Ja, Weasley, van my eie huis!”

Harry en Ron stap terug na die geselskamer. Harry het net gesê, “Ge-

lukkig is Hermien op Snerp se spoor,” toe die portret van die Vet Vrou oopswaai en Hermien inkom.

“Ek is jammer, Harry!” kerm sy. “Snerp het uitgekom en gevra wat ek daar doen en toe ek sê dat ek vir Flickerpitt wag, toe gaan haal Snerp hom en ek het nou eers weggekom. Ek weet nie waarheen Snerp is nie.”

“Dis dan tot daarnatoe, nè?” sê Harry.

Die ander twee staar na hom. Hy is bleek en sy oë glinster.

“Ek gaan vannag hier uit en ek gaan probeer om eerste by die Steen te kom,” sê hy.

“Jy’s mal,” sê Ron.

“Jy kan nie,” sê Hermien. “Na wat professor McGonagall en Snerp gesê het? Jy sal geskors word!”

“EN WAT DAARVAN?” skree Harry. “Verstaan jy nie? As Snerp die Steen in die hande kry, dan kom Woldemort terug! Het jy nie gehoor hoe dit was toe hy wou oorneem nie? Daar sal nie meer ’n Hogwarts wees om van geskors te word nie! Hy sal dit vernietig, of dit verander in ’n Skool vir Donker Kunste! Punte verloor, maak nie meer saak nie, kan julle dit nie insien nie? Dink julle hy gaan julle en jul families uitlos net oor Griffindor die huisbeker gewen het? As ek gevang word voor ek by die Steen kom, wel, dan gaan ek maar terug na die Dursleys en wag daar tot Woldemort my in die hande kry. Dis net ’n bietjie later doodgaan as wat in elk geval sou gebeur het, want ek sal nie by die Donker Kant aansluit nie! Ek gaan vannag deur daardie valdeur en niks wat julle sê, gaan my keer nie! Woldemort het my ouers vermoor, onthou!”

Hy gluur na hulle.

“Jy’s reg, Harry,” sê Hermien in ’n klein stemmetjie.

“Ek sal die onsigbaarheidsmantel gebruik,” sê Harry. “Dis ’n geluk dat ek dit teruggekry het.”

“Kan dit oor drie van ons gaan?” sê Ron.

“Al – al drie van ons?”

“Komaan, jy dink tog nie ons sal jou alleen laat gaan nie?”

“Natuurlik nie,” sê Hermien vinnig, “hoe gaan jy die Steen ooit in die hande kry sonder ons? Ek gaan ’n bietjie in my boeke rondblaai, daar’s dalk iets wat ek kan gebruik . . .”

“Maar as ons gevang word, dan word julle twee ook geskors.”

“Nie as ek dit kan verhoed nie,” sê Hermien grimmig. “Flickerpitt het stillettjies vir my gesê dat ek ’n honderd-en-twaalf persent in sy vak gekry het. Hulle sal my beslis nie uitskop nie.”

Na aandete sit die driestuks senuagtig eenkant in die geselskamer. Niemand pla hulle nie; nie een van die Griffindors wil iets met Harry te doen hê nie. Dis die eerste aand dat dit hom nie ontstel nie. Hermien is besig om deur haar aantekeninge te blaai in die hoop dat sy iets oor die to-

werspreuke wat hulle gaan teenkom, daarin sal lees. Harry en Ron sê maar min. Hulle dink aan wat hulle beplan om te doen.

Die kamer word stadig leeg soos almal bed toe gaan.

“Ons moet die mantel gaan haal,” mompel Ron toe Lee Jordaan uiteindelik ook gapend uitstap. Harry hardloop op met die trappe na die donker slaapsaal. Hy haal die mantel uit en sy oë val op die fluit wat Hagrid hom vir Kersfees gegee het. Hy steek dit in sy sak met die idee om dit op Wollie te gebruik – hy’s nie nou in die bui vir ’n gesingery nie.

Hy hardloop terug na die geselskamer.

“Ons moet die mantel hier oorgooi om seker te maak dat dit groot genoeg is om ons al drie toe te maak – as Fillis darem een van ons se voete moet sien rondloop –”

“Waarmee is julle besig?” sê ’n stem uit die hoek van die vertrek en Neville verskyn van agter ’n gemakstoel. Hy hou vir Trevor in sy hande en die padda lyk of hy hom regmaak om weer te probeer ontsnap.

“Niks, Neville, niks,” sê Harry en steek die mantel vinnig agter sy rug weg.

Neville staar na hul skuldige gesigte.

“Julle gaan weer uit,” sê hy.

“Nee, nee, nee,” sê Hermien. “Nee, ons gaan nie. Hoekom gaan jy nie liewer slaap nie?”

Harry kyk na die staanhorlosie by die deur. Hulle kan nie bekostig om nog tyd te verloor nie, Snerp is seker al klaar besig om vir Wollie aan die slaap te speel.

“Julle mag nie uitgaan nie,” sê Neville, “julle sal weer gevang word. Griffindor sal nog verder in die moeilikheid kom.”

“Jy verstaan nie,” sê Harry, “dis belangrik.”

Dit is duidelik dat Neville homself staal om iets heldhaftigs te doen.

“Ek sal dit nie toelaat nie,” sê hy en gaan staan voor die portret-opening. “Ek – ek sal met julle baklei.”

“Neville,” ontplof Ron, “gee pad voor daardie gat en moenie so ’n idioot wees –”

“Moenie vir my sê ek’s ’n idioot nie!” sê Neville. “Ek dink net julle moet nie nog reëls oortree nie! En dis julle wat gesê het ek moet my man staan!”

“Ja, maar nie teen ons nie,” sê Ron ergerlik. “Neville, jy weet nie wat jy doen nie.”

Hy stap nader en Neville laat val vir Trevor die padda wat dadelik weghop.

“Toe, toe, slaan my!” sê Neville en hou sy vuiste voor hom. “Ek is reg!”

Harry draai na Hermien.

“Doen tog iets,” sê hy desperaat.

Hermien gee 'n tree nader aan hom.

"Neville," sê sy, "ek is jammer, ek is regtig jammer."

Sy lig haar towerstaf.

"*Petreficus Totalus!*" roep sy uit en rig dit op Neville.

Neville se arms vlieg na sy sye. Sy bene spring bymekaar. Sy hele liggaam word stokstyf, hy swaai heen en weer en toe slaan hy neer op sy gesig, so styf soos 'n plank.

Hermien storm nader en draai hom om. Neville se kake is op mekaar geklem sodat hy nie kan praat nie. Sy oë is vol afgryse op hulle gerig.

"Wat het jy aan hom gedoen?" fluister Harry.

"Dis die volledige Stywelywe-vloek," sê Hermien mistroostig. "O, Neville, ek is jammer."

"Ons moet net, Neville. Kan nie nou verduidelik nie," sê Harry.

"Jy sal later verstaan, Neville," sê Ron toe hulle oor hom klim en die onsigbaarheidsmantel oor hulle koppe gooi.

Om Neville bewegingloos op die grond te laat lê, voel nie na 'n goeie teken nie. Hulle is so op hul senuwees dat die skaduwee van elke liewe standbeeld vir hulle soos Fillis lyk, en elke ritseling van die wind soos Nurks klink wat oor hulle swiep.

Aan die onderpunt van die eerste stel trappe sien hulle mev. Norris daar bo rondsluip.

"Kom ons skop haar, net hierdie een keer," fluister Ron in Harry se oor, maar Harry skud sy kop. Toe hulle versigtig om haar stap, draai mev. Norris oë soos lampe na hulle toe, maar sy doen niks.

Hulle loop niemand anders raak nie tot hulle die trappe wat na die derde verdieping lei, bereik. Nurks is halfpad teen die trappe. Hy maak die mat los sodat mense daaroor moet struikel.

"Wie's daar?" vra hy skielik terwyl hulle boontoe klim. Hy trek sy bose swart ogies op skrefies. "Ek weet jy's daar, al kan ek jou nie sien nie. Is dit 'n demoon of 'n monster of 'n simpele klein studentjie?"

Hy styg op in die lug en bly daar hang en gluur skeeloog na hulle.

"Moet vir Fillis roep, ja, ek moet; as iets ongesiens in die nag rondkruip."

Harry kry skielik 'n plan.

"Nurks," sê hy in 'n skor fluisterstem, "die Bloedige Baron het sy eie redes om onsigbaar te wees."

Nurks val amper uit die lug van skrik. Net betyds ruk hy homself reg en sweef omtrent 'n voet bo die trappe.

"So jammer, u bloedigheid, meneer die Baron," sê hy olierig. "My fout, my fout – ek het u nie gesien nie – natuurlik het ek nie, u is onsigbaar – vergewe ou Nurksie sy ou klein grappie, meneer."

"Ek is op 'n spesiale sending, Nurks," kwaak Harry. "Bly vannag hier weg."

“Ek sal, meneer, ek sal vir seker,” sê Nurks en styg weer op. “Hoop u besigheid loop goed af, Baron, ek sal u nie pla nie.”

Hy skarrel weg.

“Briljant, Harry!” fluister Ron.

’n Paar sekondes later is hulle daar, net buite die derde verdieping se gang – en die deur staan reeds effens oop.

“Wel, kyk net hier,” sê Harry stadig. “Snerp is reeds verby Wollie.”

Die oop deur bring hulle al drie opnuut onder die indruk van dit wat hulle die hoof moet bied. Onder die mantel draai Harry na die ander twee.

“As julle wil teruggaan, sal ek julle nie kwalik neem nie,” sê hy. “Julle kan die mantel neem, ek het dit nie meer nodig nie.”

“Moenie laf wees nie,” sê Ron.

“Ons kom saam,” sê Hermien.

Harry stoot die deur oop.

Die skarniere kraak en ’n lae rammelende gegrom bereik hul ore. Al drie die hond se neuse snuif verwoed in hul rigting, selfs al kan die dier hulle nie sien nie.

“Wat’s dit daar by sy voete?” fluister Hermien.

“Lyk soos ’n harp,” sê Ron. “Snerp moes dit daar laat lê het.”

“Hy word seker wakker sodra jy ophou speel,” sê Harry. “Wel, hier gaan ons . . .”

Hy sit Hagrid se fluit teen sy lippe en blaas. Dis nie juis ’n goeie deuntjie nie, maar reeds met die eerste noot begin die dier se ooglede sak. Harry haal skaars asem. Die hond se gegrom word flouër – hy wieg op sy pote en sak neer op sy knieë, toe val hy op die grond, vas aan die slaap.

“Hou aan speel,” waarsku Ron vir Harry terwyl hulle uit die mantel glip en na die valdeur sluip. Hulle voel die hond se warm, stink asem toe hulle by die reusekoppe kom.

“Ek dink ons sal die deur kan oopmaak,” sê Ron en kyk oor die hond se rug. “Wil jy eerste gaan, Hermien?”

“Nee, ek wil nie!”

“Goed dan.” Ron kners op sy tande en tree versigtig oor die hond se bene. Hy buk en trek aan die ring in die valdeur wat op- en oopswaai.

“Kan jy iets sien?” vra Hermien angstig.

“Niks – net swart – daar’s nie ’n manier om af te klim nie, ons sal moet spring.”

Harry, wat nog steeds op die fluit speel, waai na Ron om sy aandag te trek en wys na homself.

“Wil jy eerste gaan? Is jy seker?” sê Ron. “Ek weet nie hoe diep die afgrond is nie. Gee die fluit vir Hermien sodat sy hom aan die slaap kan hou.”

Harry gee die fluit vinnig aan. In die paar sekondes wat dit stil is,

begin die hond ruk en grom, maar die oomblik toe Hermien begin speel, raak dit weer weg in 'n diep slaap.

Harry klim oor die dier en staar af deur die oop valdeur. Daar is nie 'n teken van 'n bodem nie.

Hy laat sak homself deur die gat tot hy net aan sy vingerpunte hang. Toe kyk hy op na Ron en sê, "As daar iets met my gebeur, moenie agter my aankom nie. Gaan dadelik na die uilhuis en stuur Hedwig na Dompeldorius toe."

"Goed," sê Ron.

"Sien jou nou-nou, hoop ek . . ."

Harry laat los. Koue, klam lug fluit om sy ore en hy val af, af, af en – BOEF. Met 'n snaakse, gedempte plof land hy op iets sags. Hy sit regop en voel om hom; sy oë is nie gewoond aan die skemerdonker nie. Dit voel asof hy op 'n soort plant sit.

"Alles reg!" roep hy boontoe waar 'n ligkol so groot soos 'n posseël wys waar die oop valdeur is. "Dis 'n sakte landing, julle kan maar spring!"

Ron voeg dadelik die daad by die woord. Hy land uitgestrek reg langs Harry.

"Watse goed is dit?" is sy eerste woorde.

"Weet nie, 'n soort plant of iets. Dis seker hier om 'n mens se val te breek. Komaan, Hermien!"

Die musiek hou op. Die hond gee 'n harde blaf, maar Hermien het reeds gespring. Sy land aan Harry se ander kant.

"Ons moet kilometers onder die skool wees," sê sy.

"Dis werklik 'n geluk dat hierdie plant hier is," sê Ron.

"'n *Geluk!*" skree Hermien. "Kyk hoe lyk julle!"

Sy spring op en sukkel om by die klam muur te kom. Sy *moet* sukkel, want die oomblik wat sy geland het, het die plant slangagtige rankers om haar enkels begin draai. En sonder dat hulle dit agtergekom het, is Harry en Ron reeds styf vasgewikkel.

Hermien kry haarself los voor die plant 'n ferm greep op haar kan kry. Vol afgryse kyk sy hoe die twee seuns baklei om die plant se tentakels af te trek; hoe meer hulle rem en beur, hoe stywer en digter wikkel die plant hulle toe.

"Hou op beweeg!" beveel Hermien. "Ek weet wat aangaan – dis duiwelsklou!"

"O, ek is so bly om te weet wat dit is, dit help regtig baie," snou Ron haar toe en beur na 'n kant om te keer dat die plant om sy nek krul.

"Bly tog stil, ek probeer onthou hoe om dit dood te maak!" sê Hermien.

"Wel, skud op, ek kan nie asem kry nie!" hyg Harry en worstel met die rankers wat styf om sy bors vastrek.

“Duiwelsklou, duiwelsklou . . . wat het professor Spruit nou weer gesê? Dit hou van donkerte en nattigheid –”

“Maak ’n vuur!” wurg Harry dit uit.

“Ja – natuurlik – maar ons het nie hout nie!” roep Hermien en wring haar hande.

“IS JY MAL IN JOU KOP, OF WAT?” bulder Ron. “IS JY ’N HEKS OF NIE?”

“O ja!” sê Hermien en pluk haar towerstaf uit, waai dit, mompel iets en stuur ’n straal van dieselfde persblou vlamme wat sy teen Snerp gebruik het, na die plant. Binne oomblikke voel die seuns hoe die plant se houvas verslap soos dit wegkrimp van die hitte en die lig af. Slingerend en spartelend wikkell die plant sy rankers los tot die seuns hulself uit sy greep kan skeur.

“Wat ’n geluk dat jy oplet in die Herbologie-klas, Hermien,” sê Harry toe hy by haar teen die muur gaan staan en die sweet van sy voorkop afvee.

“Ja,” sê Ron, “dis ook ’n geluk dat Harry nie kop verloor in ’n krisis nie – ‘ons het nie hout nie’, *verbeel* jou.”

“Hierdie kant toe,” sê Harry en wys na ’n klipgang wat die enigste pad vorentoe is.

Al wat hulle kan hoor, behalwe hul eie voetval, is die gedrup-drup van water teen die mure. Die gang daal geleidelik en laat Harry aan Edelgolt dink. Sy hart skop onaangenaam wild toe hy onthou dat daar drake in die towenaarsbank is wat die kluiise oppas. As hulle darem ’n draak moet raakloop, ’n uitgegroeide draak – Norbert was erg genoeg.

“Hoor jy iets?” fluister Ron.

Harry luister. ’n Sagte geruis en ’n geklingel kom iewers van bo af.

“Dink jy dis ’n spook?”

“Ek weet nie . . . klink vir my soos vlerke.”

“Daar’s lig voor ons – ek sien iets beweeg.”

Hulle het aan die end van die gang gekom en voor hulle is ’n helder verligte vertrek; die plafon is ’n koepel hoog bo hulle. Dis vol klein, juweelblink voëltjies wat deur die vertrek fladder. Aan die oorkant is ’n swaar houtdeur.

“Dink jy hulle gaan ons aanval as ons deur die kamer probeer stap?” sê Ron.

“Waarskynlik,” sê Harry. “Hulle lyk nie juis gevaarlik nie, maar as hulle almal gelyk op ’n mens afvlieg . . . Wel, wat anders kan ons doen . . . hier gaan ek.”

Hy haal diep asem, hou sy arms oor sy gesig en nael oor die vertrek. Hy verwag dat skerp snawels en kloue enige oomblik in hom geslaan gaan word, maar niks gebeur nie. Heeltemal ongedeed bereik hy die deur. Hy trek aan die knop, maar dit is gesluit.

Die ander twee volg hom. Hulle pluk en rem aan die deur, maar dit roer nie, nie eens toe Hermien haar Alohomora-towerspreuk probeer nie.

“Wat nou?” sê Ron.

“Hierdie voëls . . . hulle kan nie net vir die mooi wees nie,” sê Hermien.

Hulle kyk hoe die voëls bo hul koppe rondvlieg. Hulle skitter – skitter?

“Dis nie voëls nie!” sê Harry skielik, “dis *sleutels*! Sleutels met vlerke – kyk goed. Dit moet beteken . . .” hy kyk rond in die vertrek terwyl die ander twee met groot oë na die swerm sleutels staar. “. . . Ja – kyk! Besemstokke! Ons moet die deur se sleutel gaan vang!”

“Maar daar is *honderde* van hulle!”

Ron bekyk die deur se slot.

“Dis ’n groot outydse een – silwer, sou ek sê, soos die deur se knop.”

Hulle gryp elk ’n besemstok, skop weg en seil die lug in tot in die middel van die wolk sleutels. Hulle gryp rond, maar die betowerde sleutels dartel en duik so vinnig dat dit feitlik onmoontlik is om een te vang.

Dis nie verniet dat Harry die jongste Soeker van die eeu is nie. Hy het ’n gawe om dinge te sien wat ander mense nie oplet nie. Nadat hy ’n paar minute tussen die warreling van reënboogvere rondgevlieg het, merk hy ’n groot silwer sleutel met ’n gebuigde vlerk, asof dit reeds tevore gevang en hardhandig in ’n sleutelgat gedruk is.

“Daardie een!” roep hy na die ander. “Daardie grote – daar – nee, daar – met die helderblou vlerke – die vere aan die een kant is gefrommel.”

Ron gee vet in die rigting waarna Harry wys, bots teen die plafon en val amper van sy besem af.

“Ons moet dit omsingel!” roep Harry uit, sonder om sy oë van die sleutel met die beskadigde vlerk af te haal. “Ron, kom jy van bo af – Hermien, bly daar onder rond en keer dat dit afgaan – ek sal dit probeer vang. Reg, NOU!”

Ron duik, Hermien skiet boontoe, die sleutel systap hulle albei en Harry sit dit agterna; dit pyl op die muur af, Harry leun vooroor en, met een hand en met ’n nare kraakgeluid druk hy dit vas teen die klippe. Ron en Hermien se gejuig eggo deur die hoë vertrek.

Hulle land vinnig en Harry hardloop na die deur met die spartelende sleutel styf in sy hand. Hy stamp dit by die slot in en draai – dit werk. Die oomblik toe die slot oopklik, trek die sleutel die lug in. Dit lyk erg verflenterd nou dat dit twee keer gevang is.

“Gereed?” vra Harry, sy hand op die knop. Die ander twee knik. Hy stoot die deur oop.

Die volgende vertrek is so donker, hulle kan omtrent niks sien nie. Maar toe hulle instap, is die vertrek plotseling helder verlig en sien hulle ’n verstommende gesig.

Hulle staan op die rand van 'n enorme skaakstel, reg agter die swart skaakstukke wat almal langer as hulle is en lyk of hulle uit swart klip gekerf is. Aan die oorkant staan die wit stukke. Harry, Ron en Hermien sidder – die wit skaakstukke het nie gesigte nie.

“Wat moet ons nou doen?” fluister Harry.

“Dis tog duidelik?” sê Ron. “Ons moet ons pad na die oorkant van die vertrek oopspeel.”

Agter die wit stukke sien hulle nog 'n deur.

“Hoe?” vra Hermien verbouereerd.

“Ek dink,” sê Ron, “ons moet skaakstukke wees.”

Hy stap na 'n swart ridder en steek sy hand na die ridder se perd toe uit. Onmiddellik begin die klip lewe. Die perd kap die grond en die ridder, wat 'n helm op het, draai sy kop om na Ron te kyk.

“Moet ons – h'm – moet ons saamspeel om aan die ander kant te kom?”

Die swart ridder knik. Ron draai na die ander twee.

“Ons moet eers mooi dink . . .” sê hy. “Ons moet seker in die plek van drie van die swart stukke speel . . .”

Harry en Hermien bly tjoepstil staan en kyk hoe Ron dink. Uiteindelik sê hy, “Moet nou nie kwaad word nie, maar julle is nie een juis goed in skaak nie –”

“Ons is nie,” sê Harry gou. “Sê jy maar net wat ons moet doen.”

“Wel, Harry, jy neem daardie biskop se plek en Hermien, jy kan langs-aan gaan staan in die plek van die kasteel.”

“Wat van jou?”

“Ek is 'n ridder,” sê Ron.

Die skaakstukke moet geluister het, want 'n ridder, 'n biskop en 'n kasteel draai hul rûe op die wit stukke en loop af, sodat daar drie oop plekke vir Harry, Ron en Hermien is.

“Wit speel altyd eerste in skaak,” sê Ron en tuur oor die bord. “Ja . . . kyk . . .”

'n Wit pion het twee blokkies vorentoe beweeg.

Ron begin vir die swart stukke bevele gee. Stilweg gaan hulle na waar hy hulle stuur. Harry se knieë bewe. Wat as hulle verloor?

“Harry, beweeg diagonaal vier blokke na regs.”

Hul eerste groot skok kom toe hul ander ridder geneem word. Die wit koningin stamp hom om en sleep hom van die bord af, waar hy doodstil bly lê, met sy gesig op die vloer.

“Dit moet gebeur het,” sê Ron, maar hy lyk geskok. “Gee jou die kans om daardie biskop te neem, Hermien, toe nou.”

Elke keer dat hulle een van hul manskappe verloor, slaan die wit stukke genadeloos terug. Sommer gou leun 'n hele klomp kruppel swart stukke teen die muur. Twee keer sien Ron net betyds dat Harry en Hermien

in gevaar is. Hy dartel oor die bord en neem amper net soveel wit stukke as wat die swart span al verloor het.

“Ons is amper daar,” mompel hy skielik. “Laat ek sien – ek moet dink . . .”

Die wit koningin draai haar leë gesig na hom.

“Ja . . .” sê Ron saggies, “dis die enigste manier . . . ek moet geneem word.”

“NEE!” skree Harry en Hermien.

“Dis skaak,” snou Ron hulle toe. “’n Mens moet opofferings maak! Ek gaan een tree vorentoe gee sodat sy my kan neem – dan is jy vry om hul koning te skaak, Harry!”

“Maar –”

“Wil jy vir Snerp stop, of wil jy nie?”

“Ron –”

“Luister, as ons nie gou maak nie, het hy daardie Steen!”

Daar is niks anders om te doen nie.

“Gereed?” roep Ron uit, sy gesig bleek, maar vasberade. “Hier gaan ek – en moenie hier rondhang na julle gewen het nie.”

Hy tree vorentoe en die wit koningin storm. Sy slaan Ron hard oor die kop met haar kliparm en hy stort vloer toe – Hermien skree, maar bly op haar blok – die wit koningin sleep Ron eenkant toe. Dit lyk of hy bewusteloos is.

Harry bewe toe hy drie spasies na links beweeg.

Die wit koning haal sy kroon af en gooi dit aan Harry se voete. Hulle het gewen. Die skaakmanne gee pad en buig. Die pad na die deur is skoon. Met ’n laaste benoude kyk na Ron nael Harry en Hermien na die deur en op met die volgende gang.

“Wat as hy – ?”

“Hy sal regkom,” sê Harry en probeer hard om dit self ook te glo. “Wat dink jy gaan nou nog alles gebeur?”

“Ons het Spruit s’n gehad, dit was die duiwelsklou – Flickerpitt het seker die towerkrag op die sleutels gesit – McGonagall het die skaakstukke getransfigureer en lewend gemaak – dan’s daar nog Quirrell s’n en Snerp . . .”

Hulle het nog ’n deur bereik.

“Gereed?” fluister Harry.

“Ja.”

Harry stoot dit oop.

’n Walglike reuk vul hul neusgate, sodat hulle hul klere oor hul neuse hou. Deur betraande oë sien hulle, plat op die grond voor hulle, ’n trol, selfs groter as die een wat hulle in die kleedkamer getakel het. Hy is kat-swink en daar is ’n bloederige knop teen sy kop.

“Ek’s hengse bly ons hoef nie teen hom te baklei nie,” fluister Harry

toe hulle versigtig oor een van die massiewe bene klim. "Kom, ek kan skaars asemhaal."

Hy maak die volgende deur oop, hulle is albei amper te bang om te kyk wat daar binne is – maar dis niks skrikwekkends nie, net 'n tafel met sewe bottels in verskillende groottes en fatsoene wat in 'n ry daarop staan.

"Snerp s'n," sê Harry. "Wat moet ons nou weer doen?"

Hulle tree oor die drumpel en dadelik spring 'n vuur agter hulle in die kosyn aan die brand. Dis ook nie 'n gewone vuur nie; dis pers. Terselfdertyd skiet swart vlamme uit die deur voor hulle. Hulle is vas.

"Kyk!" Hermien gryp 'n rol papier wat langs die bottels lê. Harry loer oor haar skouer en lees:

*Voor jou wag gevaar, draai om en jy is veilig,
Twee kan jou help; as jy aan hulle proe,
Een van ons neem jou vorentoe,
'n Ander vat jou terug,
Twee van ons is vol brandnetelwyn,
En drie is moordenaars, hulle skuil in hierdie ry.
Kies, tensy jy vir altyd hier wil bly.
Om jou te help, is hier leidrade, vier:
Een, al wil die gif skelmpies verdwyn,
Staan dit oop en bloot, links van die netelwyn;
Twee, heel anders is dié wat op die punte staan,
Maar bly weg van hulle as jy vooruit wil gaan;
Drie, ons is wel nie ewe groot nie, dit kan jy tog sien,
Maar nóg dwerg, nóg reus, sal die dood bedien;
Vier, die tweede van regs en die tweede van links
Is 'n tweeling in smaak, hulle lyk maar so slinks.*

Hermien slaak 'n lang sug van verligting en Harry is verbaas om te sien dat sy glimlag, die laaste ding wat hy wil doen.

"Briljant," sê Hermien. "Dis nie toor nie – dis logika – 'n raaisel. Baie van die grootste towenaars het nie 'n greintjie logika nie; hulle sal vir altyd hier sit."

"En so sal ons, of wat sê jy?"

"Natuurlik nie," sê Hermien. "Alles wat ons nodig het, staan op hierdie papier. Sewe bottels: drie is gif; twee is wyn; een sal ons veilig deur die swart vuur neem en die ander een deur die perse."

"Hoe moet ons weet watter een om te drink?"

"Gee my net kans."

Hermien lees die brief 'n paar keer deur. Toe stap sy op en af langs die ry bottels en mompel binnensmonds terwyl sy na hulle wys. Uiteindelik klap sy haar hande.

“Het dit,” sê sy. “Die kleinste botteltjie sal ons deur die swart vuur neem – na die Steen toe.”

Harry staar na die botteltjie.

“Daar’s nie genoeg vir ons albei nie,” sê hy. “Dis skaars een sluk.”

Hulle kyk na mekaar.

“Watter een sal ons deur die pers vlamme vat?”

Hermien wys na ’n ronde bottel aan die regterkant van die ry.

“Drink jy dit,” sê Harry. “Nee, luister – gaan terug en kry vir Ron – vat die besems daar in die kamer met die vlieënde sleutels, hulle sal julle deur die valdeur en verby Wollie kry – gaan reguit na die uilhuis en stuur vir Hedwig na Dompeldorius, ons het hom nodig. Dalk kan ek vir Snerp ’n rukkie lank besig hou.”

“Maar Harry – wat as Jy-Weet-Wie by hom is?”

“Wel – ek was al vantevore gelukkig,” sê Harry en wys na sy litteken. “Ek is dalk weer gelukkig.”

Hermien se lip bewe. Toe storm sy op Harry af en gooi haar arms om hom.

“Hermien!”

“Harry – jy’s ’n groot towenaar, weet jy dit.”

“Nie so goed soos jy nie,” sê Harry verleë toe sy hom laat los.

“Ek!” sê Hermien. “Boeke! En slimigheid! Daar’s belangriker dinge – vriendskap en dapperheid en – o, Harry – wees *versigtig!*”

“Drink jy eerste,” sê Harry. “Jy’s seker jy weet wat is wat, nie waar nie?”

“Doodseker,” sê Hermien. Sy neem ’n lang sluk uit die ronde bottel aan die punt en sidder.

“Is dit gif?” vra Harry benoud.

“Nee – maar dis soos ys.”

“Gou, loop – voor dit uitwerk.”

“Voorspoed – wees versigtig.”

“LOOP!”

Hermien draai om en stap dwarsdeur die pers vuur.

Harry trek sy asem diep in en tel die kleinste botteltjie op. Hy kyk na die swart vlamme.

“Hier kom ek,” sê hy en gooi die inhoud in sy keel af.

Dit is inderdaad soos ys wat deur sy liggaam vloei. Hy sit die botteltjie neer en stap vorentoe; hy staal homself, sien hoe die swart vlamme aan sy liggaam lek, maar kan hulle nie voel nie – vir ’n oomblik sien hy niks anders as donker vuur nie – toe is hy aan die ander kant, in die laaste vertrek.

Daar is reeds iemand – maar dis nie Snerp nie. Dis nie eens Woldemort nie.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



THE MAN WITH TWO FACES

It was Quirrell.

“*You!*” gasped Harry.

Quirrell smiled. His face wasn’t twitching at all.

“Me,” he said calmly. “I wondered whether I’d be meeting you here, Potter.”

“But I thought — Snape —”

“Severus?” Quirrell laughed, and it wasn’t his usual quivering treble, either, but cold and sharp. “Yes, Severus does seem the type, doesn’t he? So useful to have him swooping around like an overgrown bat. Next to him, who would suspect p-p-poor, st-stuttering P-Professor Quirrell?”

Harry couldn’t take it in. This couldn’t be true, it couldn’t.

“But Snape tried to kill me!”

“No, no, no. *I* tried to kill you. Your friend Miss Granger accidentally knocked me over as she rushed to set fire to Snape at that Quidditch match. She broke my eye contact with you. Another few seconds and I’d have got you off that broom. I’d have managed it before then if Snape hadn’t been muttering a countercurse, trying to save you.”

“Snape was trying to *save* me?”

“Of course,” said Quirrell coolly. “Why do you think he wanted to referee your next match? He was trying to make sure I didn’t do it again. Funny, really . . . he needn’t have bothered. I couldn’t do anything with Dumbledore watching. All the other teachers thought

Snape was trying to stop Gryffindor from winning, he *did* make himself unpopular . . . and what a waste of time, when after all that, I'm going to kill you tonight."

Quirrell snapped his fingers. Ropes sprang out of thin air and wrapped themselves tightly around Harry.

"You're too nosy to live, Potter. Scurrying around the school on Halloween like that, for all I knew you'd seen me coming to look at what was guarding the Stone."

"*You* let the troll in?"

"Certainly. I have a special gift with trolls — you must have seen what I did to the one in the chamber back there? Unfortunately, while everyone else was running around looking for it, Snape, who already suspected me, went straight to the third floor to head me off — and not only did my troll fail to beat you to death, that three-headed dog didn't even manage to bite Snape's leg off properly.

"Now, wait quietly, Potter. I need to examine this interesting mirror."

It was only then that Harry realized what was standing behind Quirrell. It was the Mirror of Erised.

"This mirror is the key to finding the Stone," Quirrell murmured, tapping his way around the frame. "Trust Dumbledore to come up with something like this . . . but he's in London . . . I'll be far away by the time he gets back. . . ."

All Harry could think of doing was to keep Quirrell talking and stop him from concentrating on the mirror.

"I saw you and Snape in the forest —" he blurted out.

"Yes," said Quirrell idly, walking around the mirror to look at the

back. “He was on to me by that time, trying to find out how far I’d got. He suspected me all along. Tried to frighten me — as though he could, when I had Lord Voldemort on my side. . . .”

Quirrell came back out from behind the mirror and stared hungrily into it.

“I see the Stone . . . I’m presenting it to my master . . . but where is it?”

Harry struggled against the ropes binding him, but they didn’t give. He *had* to keep Quirrell from giving his whole attention to the mirror.

“But Snape always seemed to hate me so much.”

“Oh, he does,” said Quirrell casually, “heavens, yes. He was at Hogwarts with your father, didn’t you know? They loathed each other. But he never wanted you *dead*.”

“But I heard you a few days ago, sobbing — I thought Snape was threatening you. . . .”

For the first time, a spasm of fear flitted across Quirrell’s face.

“Sometimes,” he said, “I find it hard to follow my master’s instructions — he is a great wizard and I am weak —”

“You mean he was there in the classroom with you?” Harry gasped.

“He is with me wherever I go,” said Quirrell quietly. “I met him when I traveled around the world. A foolish young man I was then, full of ridiculous ideas about good and evil. Lord Voldemort showed me how wrong I was. There is no good and evil, there is only power, and those too weak to seek it. . . . Since then, I have served him faithfully, although I have let him down many times. He has had to be very hard on me.” Quirrell shivered suddenly. “He does not forgive

mistakes easily. When I failed to steal the Stone from Gringotts, he was most displeased. He punished me . . . decided he would have to keep a closer watch on me. . . .”

Quirrell’s voice trailed away. Harry was remembering his trip to Diagon Alley — how could he have been so stupid? He’d *seen* Quirrell there that very day, shaken hands with him in the Leaky Cauldron.

Quirrell cursed under his breath.

“I don’t understand . . . is the Stone *inside* the mirror? Should I break it?”

Harry’s mind was racing.

What I want more than anything else in the world at the moment, he thought, is to find the Stone before Quirrell does. So if I look in the mirror, I should see myself finding it — which means I’ll see where it’s hidden! But how can I look without Quirrell realizing what I’m up to?

He tried to edge to the left, to get in front of the glass without Quirrell noticing, but the ropes around his ankles were too tight: he tripped and fell over. Quirrell ignored him. He was still talking to himself.

“What does this mirror do? How does it work? Help me, Master!”

And to Harry’s horror, a voice answered, and the voice seemed to come from Quirrell himself.

“Use the boy . . . Use the boy . . .”

Quirrell rounded on Harry.

“Yes — Potter — come here.”

He clapped his hands once, and the ropes binding Harry fell off.

Harry got slowly to his feet.

“Come here,” Quirrell repeated. “Look in the mirror and tell me what you see.”

Harry walked toward him.

I must lie, he thought desperately. I must look and lie about what I see, that's all.

Quirrell moved close behind him. Harry breathed in the funny smell that seemed to come from Quirrell's turban. He closed his eyes, stepped in front of the mirror, and opened them again.

He saw his reflection, pale and scared-looking at first. But a moment later, the reflection smiled at him. It put its hand into its pocket and pulled out a blood-red stone. It winked and put the Stone back in its pocket — and as it did so, Harry felt something heavy drop into his real pocket. Somehow — incredibly — *he'd gotten the Stone.*

“Well?” said Quirrell impatiently. “What do you see?”

Harry screwed up his courage.

“I see myself shaking hands with Dumbledore,” he invented. “I — I've won the House Cup for Gryffindor.”

Quirrell cursed again.

“Get out of the way,” he said. As Harry moved aside, he felt the Sorcerer's Stone against his leg. Dare he make a break for it?

But he hadn't walked five paces before a high voice spoke, though Quirrell wasn't moving his lips.

“He lies . . . He lies . . .”

“Potter, come back here!” Quirrell shouted. “Tell me the truth! What did you just see?”

The high voice spoke again.

“Let me speak to him . . . face-to-face. . . .”

“Master, you are not strong enough!”

“I have strength enough . . . for this. . . .”

Harry felt as if Devil’s Snare was rooting him to the spot. He couldn’t move a muscle. Petrified, he watched as Quirrell reached up and began to unwrap his turban. What was going on? The turban fell away. Quirrell’s head looked strangely small without it. Then he turned slowly on the spot.

Harry would have screamed, but he couldn’t make a sound. Where there should have been a back to Quirrell’s head, there was a face, the most terrible face Harry had ever seen. It was chalk white with glaring red eyes and slits for nostrils, like a snake.

“Harry Potter . . .” it whispered.

Harry tried to take a step backward but his legs wouldn’t move.

“See what I have become?” the face said. “Mere shadow and vapor . . . I have form only when I can share another’s body . . . but there have always been those willing to let me into their hearts and minds. . . . Unicorn blood has strengthened me, these past weeks . . . you saw faithful Quirrell drinking it for me in the forest . . . and once I have the Elixir of Life, I will be able to create a body of my own. . . . Now . . . why don’t you give me that Stone in your pocket?”

So he knew. The feeling suddenly surged back into Harry’s legs. He stumbled backward.

“Don’t be a fool,” snarled the face. “Better save your own life and join me . . . or you’ll meet the same end as your parents. . . . They died begging me for mercy. . . .”

“LIAR!” Harry shouted suddenly.

Quirrell was walking backward at him, so that Voldemort could still see him. The evil face was now smiling.

“How touching . . .” it hissed. “I always value bravery. . . . Yes, boy, your parents were brave. . . . I killed your father first, and he put up a courageous fight . . . but your mother needn’t have died . . . she was trying to protect you. . . . Now give me the Stone, unless you want her to have died in vain.”

“NEVER!”

Harry sprang toward the flame door, but Voldemort screamed “SEIZE HIM!” and the next second, Harry felt Quirrell’s hand close on his wrist. At once, a needle-sharp pain seared across Harry’s scar; his head felt as though it was about to split in two; he yelled, struggling with all his might, and to his surprise, Quirrell let go of him. The pain in his head lessened — he looked around wildly to see where Quirrell had gone, and saw him hunched in pain, looking at his fingers — they were blistering before his eyes.

“Seize him! SEIZE HIM!” shrieked Voldemort again, and Quirrell lunged, knocking Harry clean off his feet, landing on top of him, both hands around Harry’s neck — Harry’s scar was almost blinding him with pain, yet he could see Quirrell howling in agony.

“Master, I cannot hold him — my hands — my hands!”

And Quirrell, though pinning Harry to the ground with his knees, let go of his neck and stared, bewildered, at his own palms — Harry could see they looked burned, raw, red, and shiny.

“Then kill him, fool, and be done!” screeched Voldemort.

Quirrell raised his hand to perform a deadly curse, but Harry, by

instinct, reached up and grabbed Quirrell's face —

“AAAARGH!”

Quirrell rolled off him, his face blistering, too, and then Harry knew: Quirrell couldn't touch his bare skin, not without suffering terrible pain — his only chance was to keep hold of Quirrell, keep him in enough pain to stop him from doing a curse.

Harry jumped to his feet, caught Quirrell by the arm, and hung on as tight as he could. Quirrell screamed and tried to throw Harry off — the pain in Harry's head was building — he couldn't see — he could only hear Quirrell's terrible shrieks and Voldemort's yells of, “KILL HIM! KILL HIM!” and other voices, maybe in Harry's own head, crying, “Harry! Harry!”

He felt Quirrell's arm wrenched from his grasp, knew all was lost, and fell into blackness, down . . . down . . . down . . .

Something gold was glinting just above him. The Snitch! He tried to catch it, but his arms were too heavy.

He blinked. It wasn't the Snitch at all. It was a pair of glasses. How strange.

He blinked again. The smiling face of Albus Dumbledore swam into view above him.

“Good afternoon, Harry,” said Dumbledore.

Harry stared at him. Then he remembered: “Sir! The Stone! It was Quirrell! He's got the Stone! Sir, quick —”

“Calm yourself, dear boy, you are a little behind the times,” said Dumbledore. “Quirrell does not have the Stone.”

“Then who does? Sir, I —”

“Harry, please relax, or Madam Pomfrey will have me thrown

out.”

Harry swallowed and looked around him. He realized he must be in the hospital wing. He was lying in a bed with white linen sheets, and next to him was a table piled high with what looked like half the candy shop.

“Tokens from your friends and admirers,” said Dumbledore, beaming. “What happened down in the dungeons between you and Professor Quirrell is a complete secret, so, naturally, the whole school knows. I believe your friends Misters Fred and George Weasley were responsible for trying to send you a toilet seat. No doubt they thought it would amuse you. Madam Pomfrey, however, felt it might not be very hygienic, and confiscated it.”

“How long have I been in here?”

“Three days. Mr. Ronald Weasley and Miss Granger will be most relieved you have come round, they have been extremely worried.”

“But sir, the Stone —”

“I see you are not to be distracted. Very well, the Stone. Professor Quirrell did not manage to take it from you. I arrived in time to prevent that, although you were doing very well on your own, I must say.”

“You got there? You got Hermione’s owl?”

“We must have crossed in midair. No sooner had I reached London than it became clear to me that the place I should be was the one I had just left. I arrived just in time to pull Quirrell off you —”

“It was *you*.”

“I feared I might be too late.”

“You nearly were, I couldn’t have kept him off the Stone much

longer —”

“Not the Stone, boy, you — the effort involved nearly killed you. For one terrible moment there, I was afraid it had. As for the Stone, it has been destroyed.”

“Destroyed?” said Harry blankly. “But your friend — Nicolas Flamel —”

“Oh, you know about Nicolas?” said Dumbledore, sounding quite delighted. “You *did* do the thing properly, didn’t you? Well, Nicolas and I have had a little chat, and agreed it’s all for the best.”

“But that means he and his wife will die, won’t they?”

“They have enough Elixir stored to set their affairs in order and then, yes, they will die.”

Dumbledore smiled at the look of amazement on Harry’s face.

“To one as young as you, I’m sure it seems incredible, but to Nicolas and Perenelle, it really is like going to bed after a very, *very* long day. After all, to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure. You know, the Stone was really not such a wonderful thing. As much money and life as you could want! The two things most human beings would choose above all — the trouble is, humans do have a knack of choosing precisely those things that are worst for them.”

Harry lay there, lost for words. Dumbledore hummed a little and smiled at the ceiling.

“Sir?” said Harry. “I’ve been thinking . . . Sir — even if the Stone’s gone, Vol-, I mean, You-Know-Who —”

“Call him Voldemort, Harry. Always use the proper name for things. Fear of a name increases fear of the thing itself.”

“Yes, sir. Well, Voldemort’s going to try other ways of coming back, isn’t he? I mean, he hasn’t gone, has he?”

“No, Harry, he has not. He is still out there somewhere, perhaps looking for another body to share . . . not being truly alive, he cannot be killed. He left Quirrell to die; he shows just as little mercy to his followers as his enemies. Nevertheless, Harry, while you may only have delayed his return to power, it will merely take someone else who is prepared to fight what seems a losing battle next time — and if he is delayed again, and again, why, he may never return to power.”

Harry nodded, but stopped quickly, because it made his head hurt. Then he said, “Sir, there are some other things I’d like to know, if you can tell me . . . things I want to know the truth about. . . .”

“The truth.” Dumbledore sighed. “It is a beautiful and terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with great caution. However, I shall answer your questions unless I have a very good reason not to, in which case I beg you’ll forgive me. I shall not, of course, lie.”

“Well . . . Voldemort said that he only killed my mother because she tried to stop him from killing me. But why would he want to kill me in the first place?”

Dumbledore sighed very deeply this time.

“Alas, the first thing you ask me, I cannot tell you. Not today. Not now. You will know, one day . . . put it from your mind for now, Harry. When you are older . . . I know you hate to hear this . . . when you are ready, you will know.”

And Harry knew it would be no good to argue.

“But why couldn’t Quirrell touch me?”

“Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn’t realize that love as powerful as your mother’s for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign . . . to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever. It is in your very skin. Quirrell, full of hatred, greed, and ambition, sharing his soul with Voldemort, could not touch you for this reason. It was agony to touch a person marked by something so good.”

Dumbledore now became very interested in a bird out on the windowsill, which gave Harry time to dry his eyes on the sheet. When he had found his voice again, Harry said, “And the Invisibility Cloak — do you know who sent it to me?”

“Ah — your father happened to leave it in my possession, and I thought you might like it.” Dumbledore’s eyes twinkled. “Useful things . . . your father used it mainly for sneaking off to the kitchens to steal food when he was here.”

“And there’s something else . . .”

“Fire away.”

“Quirrell said Snape —”

“*Professor* Snape, Harry.”

“Yes, him — Quirrell said he hates me because he hated my father. Is that true?”

“Well, they did rather detest each other. Not unlike yourself and Mr. Malfoy. And then, your father did something Snape could never forgive.”

“What?”

“He saved his life.”

“*What?*”

“Yes . . .” said Dumbledore dreamily. “Funny, the way people’s minds work, isn’t it? Professor Snape couldn’t bear being in your father’s debt. . . . I do believe he worked so hard to protect you this year because he felt that would make him and your father even. Then he could go back to hating your father’s memory in peace. . . .”

Harry tried to understand this but it made his head pound, so he stopped.

“And sir, there’s one more thing . . .”

“Just the one?”

“How did I get the Stone out of the mirror?”

“Ah, now, I’m glad you asked me that. It was one of my more brilliant ideas, and between you and me, that’s saying something. You see, only one who wanted to *find* the Stone — find it, but not use it — would be able to get it, otherwise they’d just see themselves making gold or drinking Elixir of Life. My brain surprises even me sometimes. . . . Now, enough questions. I suggest you make a start on these sweets. Ah! Bertie Bott’s Every Flavor Beans! I was unfortunate enough in my youth to come across a vomit-flavored one, and since then I’m afraid I’ve rather lost my liking for them — but I think I’ll be safe with a nice toffee, don’t you?”

He smiled and popped the golden-brown bean into his mouth. Then he choked and said, “Alas! Ear wax!”

Madam Pomfrey, the nurse, was a nice woman, but very strict.

“Just five minutes,” Harry pleaded.

“Absolutely not.”

“You let Professor Dumbledore in. . . .”

“Well, of course, that was the headmaster, quite different. You need *rest*.”

“I am resting, look, lying down and everything. Oh, go on, Madam Pomfrey . . .”

“Oh, very well,” she said. “But five minutes *only*.”

And she let Ron and Hermione in.

“*Harry!*”

Hermione looked ready to fling her arms around him again, but Harry was glad she held herself in as his head was still very sore.

“Oh, Harry, we were sure you were going to — Dumbledore was so worried —”

“The whole school’s talking about it,” said Ron. “What *really* happened?”

It was one of those rare occasions when the true story is even more strange and exciting than the wild rumors. Harry told them everything: Quirrell; the mirror; the Stone; and Voldemort. Ron and Hermione were a very good audience; they gasped in all the right places, and when Harry told them what was under Quirrell’s turban, Hermione screamed out loud.

“So the Stone’s gone?” said Ron finally. “Flamel’s just going to *die*?”

“That’s what I said, but Dumbledore thinks that — what was it? — ‘to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure.’”

“I always said he was off his rocker,” said Ron, looking quite impressed at how crazy his hero was.

“So what happened to you two?” said Harry.

“Well, I got back all right,” said Hermione. “I brought Ron round — that took a while — and we were dashing up to the owlery to contact Dumbledore when we met him in the entrance hall — he already knew — he just said, ‘Harry’s gone after him, hasn’t he?’ and hurtled off to the third floor.”

“D’you think he meant you to do it?” said Ron. “Sending you your father’s Cloak and everything?”

“*Well,*” Hermione exploded, “if he did — I mean to say — that’s terrible — you could have been killed.”

“No, it isn’t,” said Harry thoughtfully. “He’s a funny man, Dumbledore. I think he sort of wanted to give me a chance. I think he knows more or less everything that goes on here, you know. I reckon he had a pretty good idea we were going to try, and instead of stopping us, he just taught us enough to help. I don’t think it was an accident he let me find out how the mirror worked. It’s almost like he thought I had the right to face Voldemort if I could. . . .”

“Yeah, Dumbledore’s off his rocker, all right,” said Ron proudly. “Listen, you’ve got to be up for the end-of-year feast tomorrow. The points are all in and Slytherin won, of course — you missed the last Quidditch match, we were steamrollered by Ravenclaw without you — but the food’ll be good.”

At that moment, Madam Pomfrey bustled over.

“You’ve had nearly fifteen minutes, now OUT,” she said firmly.

After a good night’s sleep, Harry felt nearly back to normal.

“I want to go to the feast,” he told Madam Pomfrey as she straightened his many candy boxes. “I can, can’t I?”

“Professor Dumbledore says you are to be allowed to go,” she

said sniffily, as though in her opinion Professor Dumbledore didn't realize how risky feasts could be. "And you have another visitor."

"Oh, good," said Harry. "Who is it?"

Hagrid sidled through the door as he spoke. As usual when he was indoors, Hagrid looked too big to be allowed. He sat down next to Harry, took one look at him, and burst into tears.

"It's — all — my — ruddy — fault!" he sobbed, his face in his hands. "I told the evil git how ter get past Fluffy! I told him! It was the only thing he didn't know, an' I told him! Yeh could've died! All fer a dragon egg! I'll never drink again! I should be chucked out an' made ter live as a Muggle!"

"Hagrid!" said Harry, shocked to see Hagrid shaking with grief and remorse, great tears leaking down into his beard. "Hagrid, he'd have found out somehow, this is Voldemort we're talking about, he'd have found out even if you hadn't told him."

"Yeh could've died!" sobbed Hagrid. "An' don' say the name!"

"VOLDEMORT!" Harry bellowed, and Hagrid was so shocked, he stopped crying. "I've met him and I'm calling him by his name. Please cheer up, Hagrid, we saved the Stone, it's gone, he can't use it. Have a Chocolate Frog, I've got loads. . . ."

Hagrid wiped his nose on the back of his hand and said, "That reminds me. I've got yeh a present."

"It's not a stoat sandwich, is it?" said Harry anxiously, and at last Hagrid gave a weak chuckle.

"Nah. Dumbledore gave me the day off yesterday ter fix it. 'Course, he shoul'da sacked me instead — anyway, got yeh this . . ."

It seemed to be a handsome, leather-covered book. Harry opened

it curiously. It was full of wizard photographs. Smiling and waving at him from every page were his mother and father.

“Sent owls off ter all yer parents’ old school friends, askin’ fer photos . . . knew yeh didn’ have any . . . d’yeh like it?”

Harry couldn’t speak, but Hagrid understood.

Harry made his way down to the end-of-year feast alone that night. He had been held up by Madam Pomfrey’s fussing about, insisting on giving him one last checkup, so the Great Hall was already full. It was decked out in the Slytherin colors of green and silver to celebrate Slytherin’s winning the House Cup for the seventh year in a row. A huge banner showing the Slytherin serpent covered the wall behind the High Table.

When Harry walked in there was a sudden hush, and then everybody started talking loudly at once. He slipped into a seat between Ron and Hermione at the Gryffindor table and tried to ignore the fact that people were standing up to look at him.

Fortunately, Dumbledore arrived moments later. The babble died away.

“Another year gone!” Dumbledore said cheerfully. “And I must trouble you with an old man’s wheezing waffle before we sink our teeth into our delicious feast. What a year it has been! Hopefully your heads are all a little fuller than they were . . . you have the whole summer ahead to get them nice and empty before next year starts. . . .

“Now, as I understand it, the House Cup here needs awarding, and the points stand thus: In fourth place, Gryffindor, with three hundred and twelve points; in third, Hufflepuff, with three hundred and fifty-two; Ravenclaw has four hundred and twenty-six and Slytherin, four

hundred and seventy-two.”

A storm of cheering and stamping broke out from the Slytherin table. Harry could see Draco Malfoy banging his goblet on the table. It was a sickening sight.

“Yes, yes, well done, Slytherin,” said Dumbledore. “However, recent events must be taken into account.”

The room went very still. The Slytherins’ smiles faded a little.

“Ahem,” said Dumbledore. “I have a few last-minute points to dish out. Let me see. Yes . . .

“First — to Mr. Ronald Weasley . . .”

Ron went purple in the face; he looked like a radish with a bad sunburn.

“. . . for the best-played game of chess Hogwarts has seen in many years, I award Gryffindor House fifty points.”

Gryffindor cheers nearly raised the bewitched ceiling; the stars overhead seemed to quiver. Percy could be heard telling the other prefects, “My brother, you know! My youngest brother! Got past McGonagall’s giant chess set!”

At last there was silence again.

“Second — to Miss Hermione Granger . . . for the use of cool logic in the face of fire, I award Gryffindor House fifty points.”

Hermione buried her face in her arms; Harry strongly suspected she had burst into tears. Gryffindors up and down the table were beside themselves — they were a hundred points up.

“Third — to Mr. Harry Potter . . .” said Dumbledore. The room went deadly quiet. “. . . for pure nerve and outstanding courage, I award Gryffindor House sixty points.”

The din was deafening. Those who could add up while yelling themselves hoarse knew that Gryffindor now had four hundred and seventy-two points — exactly the same as Slytherin. They had tied for the House Cup — if only Dumbledore had given Harry just one more point.

Dumbledore raised his hand. The room gradually fell silent.

“There are all kinds of courage,” said Dumbledore, smiling. “It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends. I therefore award ten points to Mr. Neville Longbottom.”

Someone standing outside the Great Hall might well have thought some sort of explosion had taken place, so loud was the noise that erupted from the Gryffindor table. Harry, Ron, and Hermione stood up to yell and cheer as Neville, white with shock, disappeared under a pile of people hugging him. He had never won so much as a point for Gryffindor before. Harry, still cheering, nudged Ron in the ribs and pointed at Malfoy, who couldn’t have looked more stunned and horrified if he’d just had the Body-Bind Curse put on him.

“Which means,” Dumbledore called over the storm of applause, for even Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff were celebrating the downfall of Slytherin, “we need a little change of decoration.”

He clapped his hands. In an instant, the green hangings became scarlet and the silver became gold; the huge Slytherin serpent vanished and a towering Gryffindor lion took its place. Snape was shaking Professor McGonagall’s hand, with a horrible, forced smile. He caught Harry’s eye and Harry knew at once that Snape’s feelings toward him hadn’t changed one jot. This didn’t worry Harry. It

seemed as though life would be back to normal next year, or as normal as it ever was at Hogwarts.

It was the best evening of Harry's life, better than winning at Quidditch, or Christmas, or knocking out mountain trolls . . . he would never, ever forget tonight.

Harry had almost forgotten that the exam results were still to come, but come they did. To their great surprise, both he and Ron passed with good marks; Hermione, of course, had the best grades of the first years. Even Neville scraped through, his good Herbology mark making up for his abysmal Potions one. They had hoped that Goyle, who was almost as stupid as he was mean, might be thrown out, but he had passed, too. It was a shame, but as Ron said, you couldn't have everything in life.

And suddenly, their wardrobes were empty, their trunks were packed, Neville's toad was found lurking in a corner of the toilets; notes were handed out to all students, warning them not to use magic over the holidays ("I always hope they'll forget to give us these," said Fred Weasley sadly); Hagrid was there to take them down to the fleet of boats that sailed across the lake; they were boarding the Hogwarts Express; talking and laughing as the countryside became greener and tidier; eating Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans as they sped past Muggle towns; pulling off their wizard robes and putting on jackets and coats; pulling into platform nine and three-quarters at King's Cross station.

It took quite a while for them all to get off the platform. A wizened old guard was up by the ticket barrier, letting them go through the gate in twos and threes so they didn't attract attention by all bursting out

of a solid wall at once and alarming the Muggles.

“You must come and stay this summer,” said Ron, “both of you — I’ll send you an owl.”

“Thanks,” said Harry, “I’ll need something to look forward to.”

People jostled them as they moved forward toward the gateway back to the Muggle world. Some of them called:

“Bye, Harry!”

“See you, Potter!”

“Still famous,” said Ron, grinning at him.

“Not where I’m going, I promise you,” said Harry.

He, Ron, and Hermione passed through the gateway together.

“There he is, Mum, there he is, look!”

It was Ginny Weasley, Ron’s younger sister, but she wasn’t pointing at Ron.

“Harry Potter!” she squealed. “Look, Mum! I can see —”

“Be quiet, Ginny, and it’s rude to point.”

Mrs. Weasley smiled down at them.

“Busy year?” she said.

“Very,” said Harry. “Thanks for the fudge and the sweater, Mrs. Weasley.”

“Oh, it was nothing, dear.”

“Ready, are you?”

It was Uncle Vernon, still purple-faced, still mustached, still looking furious at the nerve of Harry, carrying an owl in a cage in a station full of ordinary people. Behind him stood Aunt Petunia and Dudley, looking terrified at the very sight of Harry.

“You must be Harry’s family!” said Mrs. Weasley.

“In a manner of speaking,” said Uncle Vernon. “Hurry up, boy, we haven’t got all day.” He walked away.

Harry hung back for a last word with Ron and Hermione.

“See you over the summer, then.”

“Hope you have — er — a good holiday,” said Hermione, looking uncertainly after Uncle Vernon, shocked that anyone could be so unpleasant.

“Oh, I will,” said Harry, and they were surprised at the grin that was spreading over his face. “*They* don’t know we’re not allowed to use magic at home. I’m going to have a lot of fun with Dudley this summer. . . .”

Die Man met Twee Gesigte

Dit is Quirrell.

“Jy!” Harry snak na asem.

Quirrell glimlag. Sy oog trek nie meer nie.

“Ek,” sê hy kalm. “Ek het gewonder of ek jou hier gaan raakloop, Potter.”

“Maar ek dag – Snerp –”

“Severus?” Quirrell lag en dis nie sy gewone bewerige laggie nie, dis koud en skril. “Ja, Severus lyk na die regte tipe, dan nie? So bedagsaam van hom om soos ’n oorgroot vlermuis rond te swiep. Wie sal dan tog die arme st-t-totterende p-p-professor Quirrell verdink?”

Harry kan sy ore nie glo nie. Dit kan nie waar wees nie, dit kan net nie.

“Maar Snerp het my probeer doodmaak!”

“Nee, nee, nee. *Ek* het jou probeer doodmaak. Jou vriendin, juffrou La Grange het my per ongeluk omgestamp tydens die Kwiddiek-wedstryd toe sy verbygestorm het om Snerp se kleed aan die brand te steek. Dit het my oogkontak met jou verbreek. Net nog ’n paar sekondes en ek het jou van daardie besem af gehad. Ek sou lank voor dit al daarin geslaag het, maar Snerp het ’n teenvloek staan en mompel om jou te probeer red.”

“Snerp het my probeer *red*?”

“Natuurlik,” sê Quirrell koeltjies. “Waarom dink jy wou hy skeidsregter wees met die volgende wedstryd? Hy wou seker maak dat ek nie weer iets probeer nie. Snaaks, eintlik . . . hy kon homself die moeite gespaar het. Ek kon niks doen met Dompeldorius in die rondte nie. Al die ander onderwysers het gedink Snerp wou keer dat Griffindor wen, hy het homself werklik ongewild gemaak . . . wat ’n mors van tyd, aangesien ek jou in elk geval vannag gaan vermoor.”

Quirrell klap sy vingers. Toue spring uit die lug en bind Harry styf vas.

“Jy’s te veel van ’n nuuskierige agie om te lewe, Potter. Sluip rond in die skool in die middel van die nag op Allerheiligeaand. Vir al wat ek weet, het jy gesien toe ek kom kyk het wat die Steen alles veilig moet hou.”

“Jy het die trol laat inkom?”

“Sekerlik. Ek het ’n besondere gawe as dit by trolle kom – jy’t seker gesien wat ek met die een in die vertrek daar anderkant gedoen het? Ongelukkig, terwyl almal rondgeskarrel het om dit te soek, het Snerp, wat my reeds verdink het, reguit na die derde verdieping gegaan om my te keer – en nie net het my trol jou nie doodgemaak nie, daardie driekoppige hond het Snerp se been nie eens behoorlik afgebyt nie.

“Net ’n bietjie geduld, Potter. Ek wil net gou na hierdie interessante spieël kyk.”

Dis toe dat Harry besef wat agter Quirrell staan. Dit is die Spieël van Etreegeb.

“Hierdie spieël is die sleutel tot die Steen,” brom Quirrell en tik-tik aan die raam. “Dis net Dompeldorius wat so iets sal uitdink . . . maar hy’s in Londen . . . ek sal ver weg wees teen die tyd dat hy terugkom . . .”

Al waaraan Harry kan dink, is om Quirrell so lank moontlik aan die praat te hou en te keer dat hy op die spieël konsentreer.

“Ek het jou en Snerp in die woud gesien –” blaker hy uit.

“Ja,” sê Quirrell onverskillig en stap om die spieël om dit van agter te bekijk. “Teen daardie tyd het hy my reeds verdink, het probeer uitvind hoe ver ek gekom het. Hy was die hele tyd agterdogtig. My probeer bangpraat – asof hy kan, ek, met Woldemort aan my kant . . .”

Quirrell kom uit van agter die spieël en staar hongerig daarin.

“Ek sien die Steen . . . hoe ek dit aan my meester gee . . . waar is dit?”

Harry rem aan die toue wat hom vasgebind hou, maar hulle gee nie mee nie. Hy moet vir Quirrell keer. Hy mag nie sy volle aandag aan die spieël gee nie.

“Maar Snerp haat my.”

“O ja, dit is so,” sê Quirrell ligweg, “genade, ja. Hy was in Hogwarts in jou pa se tyd, het jy nie geweet nie? Hulle kon mekaar nie verdra nie. Maar hy wou jou nooit dood hê nie.”

“Maar ’n paar dae gelede het ek jou hoor huil – ek dag dit was Snerp wat jou dreig . . .”

Vir die eerste keer flits ’n titseltjie vrees oor Quirrell se gesig.

“Partykeer,” sê hy, “vind ek dit moeilik om my meester se bevele uit te voer – hy is ’n groot towenaar en ek is swak –”

“Jy bedoel hy was daar in die klaskamer saam met jou?” Harry snak na asem.

“Hy is by my, waar ek ook al gaan,” sê Quirrell stil. “Ek het hom leer ken toe ek om die wêreld gereis het. Ek was ’n dwase jong man, vol verspotte idees oor goed en kwaad. My meester Woldemort het vir my gewys hoe verkeerd ek is. Daar is nie iets soos goed en kwaad nie, daar is net mag, en diegene wat te swak is om dit na te jaag . . . Van toe af het ek hom getrou gedien, hoewel ek hom ’n paar keer in die steek gelaat het. Hy moes baie streng met my wees.” Quirrell sidder skielik. “Hy vergewe

foute nie maklik nie. Toe ek nie daarin geslaag het om die Steen by Edulgolt te steel nie, was hy baie ontevrede. Hy het my gestraf . . . besluit hy moet my beter dophou . . .”

Quirrell se stem raak weg. Harry onthou die rit na Diagonaalstraat – hoe kon hy so dom gewees het? Hy het Quirrell daardie dag daar *gesien*, sy hand geskud in Die Kokende Pot.

Quirrell vloek binnensmonds.

“Ek verstaan dit nie . . . is die Steen *binne-in* die spieël? Moet ek dit breek?”

Harry dink vinnig.

Wat *ek* op die oomblik bo alles in die wêreld begeer, dink hy, is om die Steen voor Quirrell te kry. As ek in die spieël kyk, sal ek sien hoe ek dit vind – wat beteken ek sal weet waar dit weggesteek is! Maar hoe kan ek daarin kyk sonder dat Quirrell agterkom wat ek wil doen?

Hy probeer na links beur, sodat hy voor die spieël kan kom sonder dat Quirrell iets merk, maar die toue om sy enkels is te styf: hy struikel en val. Quirrell ignoreer hom. Hy praat nog steeds met homself.

“Wat is dit wat hierdie spieël doen? Hoe werk dit? Help my, meester!”

Tot Harry se ontsteltenis, antwoord ’n stem, en dis of die stem uit Quirrell self kom.

“Gebruik die seun . . . Gebruik die seun . . .”

Quirrell draai om na Harry.

“Goed – Potter – kom hier.”

Hy klap sy hande een keer en die toue val af. Harry kom stadig orent.

“Kom hier,” herhaal Quirrell. “Kyk in die spieël en sê vir my wat jy sien.”

Harry stap nader.

“Ek sal moet lieg,” dink hy desperaat. Ek moet kyk en jok oor wat ek sien, dis al.

Quirrell stap tot agter hom. Harry kry weer die snaakse reuk wat uit Quirrell se tulband opslaan. Hy maak sy oë toe, tree tot voor die spieël en maak hulle weer oop.

Hy sien sy weerkaatsing, hy lyk bleek en verskrik. ’n Oomblik later glimlag die spieëlbeeld egter vir hom. Dit steek sy hand in sy sak en haal ’n bloedrooi klip uit. Dit knipoog en sit die Steen terug in sy sak – en toe hy dit doen, voel Harry hoe iets swaars in sy eie sak val. Op die een of ander ongelooflike manier – *het hy die Steen*.

“Toe-toe,” sê Quirrell ongeduldig. “Wat sien jy daar?”

Harry skraap al sy moed bymekaar.

“Ek sien hoe ek hande skud met Dompeldorius,” maak hy op. “Ek het die huisbeker vir Griffindor verower.”

Quirrell vloek weer.

“Gee tog pad,” sê hy.

Toe Harry eenkant toe tree, voel hy die Towenaarsteen teen sy bobeen. Kan hy dit waag om te probeer wegkom?

Hy het skaars vyf tree gegee toe hy 'n skril stem hoor praat, hoewel Quirrell se lippe nie geroer het nie.

“Hy lieg . . . hy lieg . . .”

“Potter, kom terug!” skreeu Quirrell. “Praat die waarheid! Wat het jy gesien?”

Weer praat die skel stem.

“Laat ek met hom praat . . . van aangesig tot aangesig . . .”

“Meester, u is nie sterk genoeg nie!”

“Ek het genoeg krag . . . hiervoor . . .”

Dit voel vir Harry of hy in die duiwelsklou verstrengel is. Hy kan nie 'n spier verroer nie. Asof versteen, sien hy hoe Quirrell sy tulband begin losmaak. Wat is aan die gang? Die tulband val grond toe. Quirrell se kop lyk vreemd klein daarsonder. Toe draai hy stadig om.

Harry sou gegil het, maar hy kan nie 'n geluid uitkry nie. Daar waar Quirrell se agterkop moet wees, is 'n gesig, die aakligste gesig wat Harry nog gesien het. Dit is krytwit met glurende rooi oë en gleuwe vir neusgate, soos 'n slang.

“Harry Potter . . .” fluister dit.

Harry probeer om terug te tree, maar sy bene weier.

“Sien jy wat van my geword het?” sê die stem. “Net skaduwee en w asem . . . ek het net vorm as ek iemand se liggaam kan deel . . . maar daar was nog altyd diegene wat my in hul hart en in hul verstand laat woon . . . Eenhoringbloed het my hierdie laaste paar weke krag gegee . . . jy het gesien hoe die troue Quirrell dit vir my drink daar in die woud . . . en as ek eers die Eliksir van die Lewe het, sal ek weer 'n liggaam van my eie hê. Gee nou vir my daardie Steen wat jy in jou sak het.”

Hy weet dus. Die lewe vloei skielik terug in Harry se bene. Hy strompel agteruit.

“Moenie 'n dwaas wees nie,” grom die gesig. “Red jou eie lewe en sluit by my aan . . . of jy sal dieselfde einde as jou ouers hê . . . Hulle het om genade gesmeek toe hulle sterf . . .”

“DIT LIEG JY!” skree Harry dadelik.

Quirrell stap agteruit na hom toe, sodat Woldemort hom nog steeds kan sien. Nou glimlag die boosaardige gesig.

“Hoe hartverskeurend . . .” sis hy. “Ek het dapperheid nog altyd bewonder . . . Ja, boet, jou ouers was dapper . . . ek het jou vader eerste doodgemaak, al het hy hom heldhaftig verset . . . maar dit was nie nodig vir jou moeder om te sterf nie . . . sy het jou probeer beskerm . . . Gee nou vir my die Steen, tensy jy wil hê dat sy verniet gesterf het.”

“NOOIT!”

Harry spring na die vlammedeur, maar Woldemort skreeu, “GRYP

HOM!" en die volgende oomblik voel Harry hoe Quirrell se hand om sy pols sluit. Oombliklik skiet 'n skroeiende pyn deur Harry se litteken; dit voel of sy kop in twee gaan split; hy gil, sit hom teen met al sy krag, en tot sy verbasing laat Quirrell hom los. Die pyn in sy kop begin bedaar – hy kyk verskrik rond om te sien waar Quirrell is en sien hoe hy, vooroorgebuig van pyn, na sy vingers staar – blase slaan uit op sy hande.

"Gryp hom! GRYP HOM!" skree Woldemort weer en Quirrell gooi homself op Harry en stamp hom van sy voete af. Hy land bo-op Harry, sy hande sluit om Harry se nek – Harry is feitlik verblind van pyn, maar hy kan sien hoe Quirrell brul van die pyn.

"Meester, ek kan hom nie vashou nie – my hande – my handel!" Hoewel Quirrell nog steeds vir Harry met sy knieë teen die grond vaspen, laat los hy Harry se nek en staar verwilderd na sy eie handpalms – Harry kan sien hulle lyk verbrand, rou, rooi en blink.

"Maak hom dood, jou gek, en kry klaar!" krys Woldemort.

Quirrell lig sy hand om 'n dodelike vloek uit te spreek, maar sonder dat hy regtig weet hoekom hy dit doen, steek Harry sy hande uit en gryp Quirrell se gesig vas.

"AAAAARG!"

Quirrell rol van hom af, blase slaan uit op sy gesig en toe weet Harry: Quirrell kan nie aan sy vel raak sonder dat hy die vreeslikste pyn ervaar nie – sy enigste kans is om aan Quirrell vas te hou, te sorg dat hy soveel pyn het dat hy nie 'n vloek kan uitspreek nie.

Harry spring orent, gryp Quirrell aan die arm en klou vas so styf as wat hy kan. Quirrell skree en probeer hom afskud – die pyn in Harry se kop bou op – hy kan nie sien nie – hy hoor net Quirrell se vreeslike krete en Woldemort se gille: "MAAK HOM DOOD! MAAK HOM DOOD!" maar hy hoor ook ander stemme, dalk in sy eie kop, stemme wat "Harry! Harry!" skree.

Hy voel hoe Quirrell homself uit sy greep skeur, hy weet alles is verlore en hy val die duisternis in, af . . . af . . . af . . .

Iets gouds skitter bo hom. Die Snip! Hy probeer dit gryp, maar sy arms is te swaar.

Hy knipper sy ooglede. Dis nie die Snip nie. Dis 'n bril. Hoe vreemd.

Weer knip hy sy oë. Die glimlaggende gesig van Albus Dompeldorius verskyn bo hom.

"Goeiemiddag, Harry," sê Dompeldorius.

Harry staar na hom. Toe onthou hy. "Professor! Die Steen! Dit was Quirrell! Hy het die Steen! Maak gou professor, gou –"

"Bedaar, seun, jy het tred verloor met die tyd," sê Dompeldorius. "Quirrell het nie die Steen nie."

"Wie dan? Professor, ek –"

“Harry, ontspan asseblief, of Madame Pomfrey gooi my hier uit.”

Harry sluk en staar om hom. Hy moet in die siekeboeg wees. Hy lê in ’n bed met wit linnelakens en langs hom is ’n tafel gelaai met wat na die helfte van die lekkergoedwinkel lyk.

“Presente van jou vriende en bewonderaars,” sê professor Dompeldorius stralend. “Wat in die kerkers tussen jou en professor Quirrell gebeur het, is natuurlik ’n volslae geheim, gevolglik weet die hele skool daarvan. Menere Fred en George Weasley het selfs probeer om vir jou ’n toiletsitplek te stuur. Het seker gedink dat jy dit humoristies sal vind. Madame Pomfrey het gevoel dis onhigiënies en het dit verwyder.”

“Hoe lank lê ek al hier?”

“Drie dae. Meneer Ronald Weasley en juffrou La Grange sal uiters verlig wees om te hoor dat jy bygekom het, hulle was baie bekommerd.”

“Maar, professor, die Steen –”

“Ek sien dis onmoontlik om jou aandag daarvan af te trek. Goed dan, die Steen. Professor Quirrell kon dit nie by jou afvat nie. Ek was net betyds daar om te keer, hoewel jy jou heeltemal goed van jou taak gekwyt het, moet ek bysê.”

“U was daar? Het u Hermien se uil gekry?”

“Ons moet mekaar in die lug gemis het. Ek was skaars in Londen toe ek besef dat die plek waar ek eintlik moet wees, die een is wat ek so pas verlaat het. Ek was net betyds om Quirrell van jou af te trek –”

“Dit was dus u.”

“Ek het gevrees dat ek te laat is.”

“Dit was amper, ek sou die Steen nie veel langer uit sy hande kon hou nie –”

“Nie die Steen nie, boet, jy – die inspanning het jou amper vernietig. Vir een vreeslike oomblik het ek gevrees dit het. Wat die Steen betref – dit is tot niet.”

“Tot niet?” sê Harry verstom. “Maar u vriend – Nicolas Flamel –”

“O, jy weet van Nicolas?” sê Dompeldorius en hy klink in sy skik. “Jy het dit behoorlik gedoen, nè? Wel, Nicolas en ek het daaroor gepraat en besluit dat dit die beste is.”

“Maar dit beteken hy en sy vrou sal doodgaan, nie waar nie?”

“Hulle het genoeg van die Eliksir om seker te maak dat hul sake agtermekaar is en dan, ja, dan sal hulle doodgaan.”

Dompeldorius glimlag vir die verbasing op Harry se gesig.

“Vir iemand so jonk soos jy klink dit seker ongelooflik, maar vir Nicolas en Perenelle is dit soos om te gaan slaap na ’n baie lang dag. Dit is tog immers so dat die dood vir die goed georganiseerde verstand bloot die volgende groot avontuur is. Jy weet, die Steen was nie regtig so ’n wonderlike uitvindsel nie. Soveel geld en so ’n lang lewe as wat jy wil hê! Die twee dinge wat die meeste mense bo alles begeer – die moeilikheid

is net dat mense 'n gawe het om net mooi dié dinge te kies wat die slegste vir hulle is.”

Harry lê net daar, dronkgeslaan. Dompeldorius neurie 'n deuntjie en glimlag na die dak.

“Professor?” sê Harry. “Ek het gewonder . . . selfs al is die Steen weg, kan Wolde – ek bedoel, Jy-Weet- . . .”

“Noem hom Woldemort, Harry. Gebruik altyd 'n ding se regte naam. As 'n mens vir die naam bang is, is jy sommer nog banger vir die ding ook.”

“Ja, professor. Wel, Woldemort gaan mos weer probeer om terug te kom, of hoe? Ek bedoel, hy is nie heeltemal weg nie, is hy?”

“Nee, Harry, hy is nie. Hy is nog steeds daar buite iewers, dalk soek hy 'n ander liggaam om te deel . . . omdat hy nie regtig lewe nie, kan niemand hom doodmaak nie. Hy het Quirrell vir die dood gelos; hy het net so min genade vir sy volgelinge as vir sy vyande. Onthou net, Harry, jy het dalk net vir 'n rukkie gekeer dat hy weer magtig word, maar as hy weer probeer, hoef daar net een mens te wees wat hom probeer stuit – en as hy keer op keer gestuit word, wie weet, dalk word hy nooit weer magtig nie.”

Harry knik, maar hou gou weer op, want dit laat sy kop pyn. Toe sê hy, “Professor, daar is ander dinge wat ek graag wil vra . . . dinge waaroor ek die waarheid wil hoor . . .”

“Die waarheid.” Dompeldorius sug. “Dit is 'n mooi, maar ook 'n vreeslike ding en moet baie versigtig hanteer word. Ek sal jou vrae beantwoord, tensy ek 'n goeie rede het om dit nie te doen nie, jy moet my vergewe. Ek sal natuurlik nie lieg nie.”

“Wel . . . Woldemort het gesê hy het my ma net doodgemaak omdat sy hom probeer keer het toe hy my wou doodmaak. Maar hoekom wou hy my doodmaak?”

Hierdie keer sug Dompeldorius baie swaar.

“Helaas, die eerste ding wat jy wil weet, kan ek nie vir jou sê nie. Nie vandag nie. Nie nou nie. Jy sal weet . . . eendag . . . sit dit vir eers uit jou kop, Harry. Wanneer jy ouer is . . . ek weet jy haat dit om dit te hoor . . . maar as jy gereed is, dan sal jy weet.”

Harry besef dadelik dat dit nie sal help om teen te stribbel nie.

“Maar hoekom kon Quirrell nie aan my raak nie?”

“Jou ma het gesterf om jou te red, Harry. As daar een ding is wat Woldemort nie kan verstaan nie, is dit liefde. Hy het nie geweet dat liefde so sterk soos jou ma s'n vir jou, 'n merk op 'n mens maak nie. Nie 'n litteken nie, geen sigbare teken nie . . . maar as iemand 'n mens so diep liefgehad het, is so 'n mens vir ewig beskerm, selfs al is die persoon dood. Dit lê diep in jou. Quirrell, vol haat, gierigheid en ambisie, wat sy siel met Woldemort gedeel het, kon om hierdie rede nie aan jou raak nie. Dit was

vir hom pynlik om kontak te hê met iemand wat gemerk is deur iets wat so edel is.”

Dompeldorius is skielik baie geïnteresseerd in ’n voëltjie daar buite op die vensterbank, wat Harry kans gee om sy oë aan sy laken af te vee. Toe hy weer kan praat, sê hy, “En die onsigbaarheidsmantel – weet u wie dit vir my gestuur het?”

“A – jou pa het dit in my besit gelaat en ek het gedink jy sal dalk daarvan hou.” Dompeldorius se oë vonkel. “Nuttige goed . . . jou pa het dit gewoonlik gebruik om kos uit die kombuis te steel toe hy nog hier was.”

“Daar is nog iets . . .”

“Praat maar.”

“Quirrell het gesê Snerp –”

“Professor Snerp, Harry.”

“Ja, hy – Quirrell het gesê hy haat my omdat hy my pa gehaat het. Is dit waar?”

“Wel, hulle het mekaar nogal verafsku. Baie soos jy en mnr. Malfoy. En toe het jou pa iets gedoen waarvoor Snerp hom nooit vergewe het nie.”

“Wat?”

“Hy het sy lewe gered.”

“Wat?”

“Ja . . .” sê Dompeldorius dromerig. “Snaaks hoe mense se koppe werk, nie waar nie? Professor Snerp kon dit nie verdra om in die skuld by jou pa te wees nie . . . ek dink hy het so hard gewerk om jou vanjaar te beskerm om op hierdie manier sy ereskuld terug te betaal. Dan kon hy terugsit en jou pa in vrede verder haat . . .”

Harry doen sy bes om dit te verstaan, maar sy kop pyn so dat hy liewer ophou.

“Daar is nog iets . . .”

“Net die een ding?”

“Hoe het ek die Steen uit die spieël gekry?”

“A, ek is bly jy vra my dit. Dit was een van my meer briljante idees en tussen my en jou, dit wil gedoen wees. Jy sien, net iemand wat die Steen wou vind – net wou vind, maar nie gebruik nie – kon dit daar uitkry, anders sou hulle net hulself sien goud maak of hoe hulle Elikser van die Lewe drink. Soms verbaas my breinkrag selfs vir my . . . Dis nou genoeg vroe. Ek stel voor jy takel daardie lekkergoed. Aha! Bertie Bott se Allegeurtjiebone! In my jeug was ek ongelukkig genoeg om op een af te kom wat soos braaksel smaak en van toe af was ek glad nie meer so erg daaroor nie – maar ’n toffie sal seker veilig wees, of hoe?”

Hy glimlag en steek ’n goudbruin boontjie in sy mond. Toe hoes hy en sê, “Helaas! Oorwas!”

Madame Pomfrey, die matrone, is ’n vriendelike vrou, maar baie streng.

“Net vyf minute,” pleit Harry.

“Beslis nie.”

“U het professor Dompeldorius laat inkom . . .”

“Maar natuurlik, hy’s die prinsipaal, dis heeltemal anders. Jy het rus nodig.”

“Ek rus, kyk, ek lê plat en alles. Asseblief, Madame Pomfrey . . .”

“Nou maar goed,” sê sy. “Maar net vyf minute.”

Toe laat sy vir Ron en Hermien in.

“Harry!”

Dit lyk of Hermien weer haar arms om hom gaan gooi, maar Harry is bly toe sy haarself inhou, want sy kop is nog baie seer.

“O, Harry, ons was seker jy is – Dompeldorius was so bekommerd –”

“Die hele skool praat daaroor,” sê Ron, “maar wat het nou *eintlik* gebeur?”

Dis een van daardie skaars geleenthede waar die ware verhaal baie vreemder en baie meer opwindend as die wilde gerugte is. Harry vertel hulle alles: Quirrell; die spieël; die Steen en Woldemort. Ron en Hermien is uitstekende luisteraars; hulle snak na asem op al die regte plekke en toe Harry vertel wat onder Quirrell se tulband was, skree Hermien hardop.

“Die Steen is dus weg?” sê Ron geskok. “Flamel sal sommer net doodgaan?”

“Dis hoe ek ook daaroor gevoel het, maar Dompeldorius dink dat – wat was dit nou weer? – ‘vir die goed georganiseerde verstand is die dood bloot ’n volgende groot avontuur’.”

“Ek sê nog altyd hy’s van sy trollie af,” sê Ron, maar hy lyk besonder in sy skik met sy mal held.

“Wat het van julle twee geword?” vra Harry.

“Wel, ek is daar uit,” sê Hermien, “en toe’t ek vir Ron gelaaf – dit het ’n rukkie geneem – en toe is ons na die uilehok om vir Dompeldorius ’n uil te stuur, maar toe loop ons hom raak in die ingangsportaal. Hy’t alreeds geweet – hy’t net gesê, ‘Harry is agter hom aan, nê?’ en toe’t hy na die derde verdieping gestorm.”

“Dink jy hy het verwag dat jy dit sal doen?” sê Ron. “Hy het vir jou daardie onsigbaarheidsmantel gestuur en alles.”

“Wel,” ontplof Hermien, “as dit moet waar wees – ek bedoel – dit is verskriklik – jy kon dood gewees het.”

“Nee, dit is nie,” sê Harry peinsend. “Hy’s ’n snaakse man, Dompeldorius. Ek dink hy wou my so soort van ’n kans gee. Ek dink hy weet omtrent alles wat hier aangaan. Ek sou sê hy’t ’n goeie idee gehad dat ons gaan probeer en pleks van ons te keer, het hy ons net genoeg geleer om ons te help. Ek dink dit was glad nie ’n ongeluk dat ek uitgevind het hoe daardie spieël werk nie. Dis amper of hy gevoel het dis my reg om met Woldemort te probeer afreken . . .”

“Ja, Dompeldorius se kop is reg aangeskroef,” sê Ron trots. “Luister, jy moet op wees vir die einde-van-die-jaar-fees môre. Die punte is in en Slibberin wen natuurlik – jy het die laaste Kwiddiek-wedstryd gemis en sonder jou het Raweklou oor ons geloop – maar die kos sal goed wees.”

Op daardie oomblik kom Madame Pomfrey nader.

“Julle het amper vyftien minute gehad, so UIT,” sê sy beslis.

Na ’n goeie nagrus voel Harry amper weer normaal.

“Ek wil na die fees toe gaan,” sê hy vir Madame Pomfrey toe sy al die dose vol lekkergoed kom regskuif. “Ek kan seker, nê?”

“Professor Dompeldorius het gesê jy mag gaan,” sê sy en snuif, asof professor Dompeldorius na haar mening glad nie weet hoe ongesond sulke feeste is nie. “En hier is nog ’n besoeker vir jou.”

“O, lekker,” sê Harry. “Wie is dit?”

Net toe skuifel Hagrid om die deur. Soos gewoonlik wanneer hy binne die gebou is, lyk Hagrid te groot om daar in te pas. Hy gaan sit langs Harry, gee hom een kyk en bars uit in trane.

“Dis – alles – my – vervlakste – skuld!” snik hy, sy gesig in sy hande. “Ek het die booswig gesê hoe om verby Wollie te kom! Ek het hom gesê! Dit was al wat hy nie geweet het nie en ek het dit vir hom gesê! Jy kon dood gewees het! En alles vir ’n draakeier! Ek gaan nooit weer drink nie! Ek moet uitgeskop word en vir die res van my lewe ’n Moggel wees!”

“Hagrid!” sê Harry, geskok om te sien hoe Hagrid van spyt en verdriet bewe en hoe groot trane tot in sy baard rol. “Hagrid, hy sou in elk geval uitgevind het, dis Woldemort van wie ons praat, hy sou uitgevind het, of jy vir hom gesê het of nie.”

“Jy kon dood gewees het!” snik Hagrid. “En moenie sy naam sê nie!”

“WOLDEMORT!” bulder Harry en Hagrid is so geskok dat hy ophou huil. “Ek het hom ontmoet en ek sal sy naam sê as ek wil. Komaan Hagrid, ons het die Steen gered, dis weg, hy kan dit nie meer gebruik nie. Kry ’n Sjokoladepadda, ek het tonne . . .”

Hagrid vee sy neus met die rugkant van sy hand af en sê, “Nou onthou ek. Ek het vir jou ’n present.”

“Net nie ’n weselbroodjie nie?” sê Harry angstig en uiteindelik gee Hagrid ’n flou laggie.

“Nee. Dompeldorius het my gister ’n dag afgegee om dit te maak. Hy moes my eintlik laat loop het – maar – het dit vir jou gekry . . .”

Dit lyk soos ’n baie mooi boek wat in leer gebind is. Harry maak dit nuuskierig oop. Dis vol towenaarsfoto’s. En daar glimlaggend en wuiwend, op elke bladsy, staan sy ma en pa.

“Het uile na al jou ouers se skoolvriende gestuur en vir foto’s gevra . . . Weet jy’t niks nie . . . Hou jy daarvan?”

Harry kan nie praat nie, maar Hagrid verstaan.

Daardie aand stap Harry alleen af na waar die einde-van-die-jaar-fees gehou word. Hy is opgehou deur Madame Pomfrey wat vir oulaas wou seker maak dat hy gesond is en die Groot Saal is reeds vol. Dit is getooi in Slibberin se groen en silwer kleure om die sewende agtereenvolgende verowering van die huisbeker te vier. 'n Yslike banier met die Slibberin-slang daarop hang teen die muur agter die Hooftafel.

Toe Harry instap, is daar 'n skielike stilte en toe begin almal gelyk hard praat. Hy glip in sy sitplek tussen Ron en Hermien by die Griffindor-tafel, en probeer die feit ignoreer dat mense glad opstaan om hom te kan sien.

Gelukkig daag Dompeldorius oomblikke later op. Die gebabbel sterf weg. "Nog 'n jaar is verby!" sê Dompeldorius vrolik. "En ek moet julle verveel met 'n ou man se geklets voor ons ons tande in hierdie heerlike kos kan slaan. Wat 'n jaar was dit nie! Hopelik is almal se koppe 'n bietjie voller as tevore . . . nou het julle die hele somer om dit weer leeg te kry voor die volgende jaar begin . . .

"Ek verstaan dat die huisbeker vanaand toegeken moet word en die punte is soos volg: in die vierde plek, Griffindor, met driehonderd-en-twaalf punte; in die derde, Hoesenproes, met driehonderd-twee-en-vyftig; Raweklou het vierhonderd-ses-en-twintig en Slibberin, vierhonderd-twee-en-sewentig punte."

'n Roesemoes van geskreue en gejuig bars los vanaf die Slibberin-tafel. Harry sien hoe Draco Malfoy sy drinkbeker op die tafel stamp. Dit laat hom naar voel.

"Ja, ja, mooi so, Slibberin," sê Dompeldorius. "Dit is egter so dat onlangse gebeure ook in ag geneem moet word."

Skielik is die vertrek doodstil. Die Slibberins se glimlagte word 'n bietjie flouer.

"H'm," sê Dompeldorius. "Daar is 'n paar punte wat ter elfder ure uitgedeel moet word. Laat ek sien. Ja . . ."

"Eerstens – aan mnr. Ronald Weasley . . ."

Ron word pers in die gesig; hy lyk soos 'n radys met kwaai sonbrand. ". . . vir die beste pot skaak wat Hogwarts in baie jare gesien het, ken ek vyftig punte toe aan Griffindor."

Griffindor se gejuig laat die betowerde plafon amper afvlieg; dis of die sterre daar bo bewe. Bo die gedreun kan Percy se stem gehoor word soos hy vir die ander prefekte vertel, "My broer, weet jy! My jongste boetie! Het verby McGonagall se reuseskaakbord gekom!"

Uiteindelik is daar weer stilte.

"Tweedens – aan mej. Hermien la Grange . . . vir die gebruik van koue logika in die hitte van die stryd, ken ek vyftig punte aan Griffindor toe."

Hermien se kop val op haar arms; Harry is seker dat sy in tranen uitgebars het. Die Griffindors is buite hulself van vreugde – hulle het 'n honderd punte bygekry.

“Derdens – aan mnr. Harry Potter . . .” sê Dompeldorius. Nou heers daar ’n doodse stilte. “. . . vir senuwees van staal en besondere moed, ken ek sestig punte toe aan Griffindor.”

Dis ’n oorverdowende kabaal. Diegene wat kan optel terwyl hulle hulself hees skreeu, weet dat Griffindor nou vierhonderd-twee-en-sewentig punte het – presies kop aan kop met Slibberin. Hulle is gelyk – as Dompeldorius vir Harry net nog een punt wil bygee.

Dompeldorius lig sy hand. Die saal word stil.

“Daar is allerhande soorte moed,” sê Dompeldorius en hy glimlag. “Dit verg besonderse moed om jou man teen jou vyande te staan, maar net soveel as jy jou man teen jou vriende moet staan. Hiermee ken ek dus tien punte toe aan mnr. Neville Loggerenberg.”

As iemand op hierdie oomblik buite die Groot Saal gestaan het, sou hulle kon dink dat iets daarbinne ontplof het, so hard is die geraas wat van die Griffindor-tafel af kom. Harry, Ron en Hermien staan op om vir Neville toe te juig en Neville, wit van skok, verdwyn onder ’n horde mense wat hom wil omhels. Hy het nog nooit tevore selfs een punt vir Griffindor verower nie. Harry, wat nog steeds hande klap en juig, stamp vir Ron in die ribbes en wys na Malfoy, wat nie meer verstom en geskok kon lyk as die volledige Stywelywe-vloek op hom gesit is nie.

“Dit beteken,” roep Dompeldorius bo-oor die luide toejuiging, want selfs Raweklou en Hoesenproes vier Huis Slibberin se val, “dat die versierings verander moet word.”

Hy klap sy hande. In ’n kits is die groen muurbehangsels skarlaken-rooi en die silwer word goud; die enorme Slibberin-slang verdwyn en ’n Griffindor-leeu neem sy plek in. Met ’n aaklige geforseerde glimlag op sy gesig skud Snerp professor McGonagall se hand. Hy vang Harry se oog en Harry weet dadelik dat Snerp nog net dieselfde oor hom voel. Dit pla Harry nie. Dit lyk of die lewe volgende jaar weer doodnormaal gaan wees – so normaal as wat enigiets op Hogwarts kan wees.

Dit is die beste aand in Harry se lewe, beter as om Kwiddiek te wen of Kersfees of om ’n bergtrol plat te slaan . . . hy sal hierdie aand in sy lewe nooit vergeet nie.

Harry het amper vergeet dat die eksamenuitslae nog moet kom. Tot hul grootste verbasing is sowel hy as Ron deur met goeie punte; Hermien staan natuurlik eerste. Selfs Neville skraap deur, sy goeie Herbologie-punte vergoed vir sy treurige Towerdrankie-resultate. Hulle het gehoop dat Goliath, wat amper net so dom is as wat hy gemeen is, sal uitval, maar ook hy is deur. Dit is ’n jammerte, maar soos Ron sê, ’n mens kan nie alles wil hê nie.

En skielik is hul hangkaste leeg; hul trommels is gepak; Neville se padda is gevind waar hy wegkruip in ’n hoekie in die kleedkamer; aan-

tekeninge is uitgedeel aan alle studente om hulle te waarsku teen die gebruik van towerkuns tydens die vakansie ("Ek hou altyd duim vas dat hulle dit gaan vergeet," sê Fred Weasley bekaft); Hagrid is daar om hulle na die vloot bootjies te neem om oor die meer te seil; hulle klim op die Hogwarts Express; laggend en geselsend soos die landskap groener en netjieser word; hulle eet Bertie Bott se Allegeurtjiebone soos hulle verby die Moggeldorpië spoed; trek hul towenaarsklere uit en gewone klere aan en hou stil by perron nege-en-'n-driekwart by King's Cross-stasie.

Dit neem 'n hele tydjie voor almal op die perron is. 'n Verrimpelde ou wag staan by die kaartjiewersperring en laat hulle twee-twee en drie-drie deur, sodat hulle nie gelyktydig deur die soliede muur bars en die Moggels die skrik op die lyf jaag nie.

"Jy moet hierdie somer kom kuier," sê Ron, "albei van julle – ek sal 'n uil stuur."

"Dankie," sê Harry. "Ek het iets nodig om na uit te sien."

Mense stamp teen hulle soos hulle in die rigting van die hekke en terug na die Moggelwêreld beweeg. Iemand roep uit:

"Tot siens, Harry!"

"Sien jou, Potter!"

"Nog steeds beroemd," sê Ron en hy grinnik.

"Nie daar waarheen ek op pad is nie, ek belowe jou," sê Harry.

Hy, Ron en Hermien stap saam deur die hekke.

"Daar is hy, Ma, daar is hy, kyk!"

Dis Ginny Weasley, Ron se sussie, maar sy wys nie na Ron nie.

"Harry Potter!" skreeu sy. "Kyk, Ma! Ek sien vir –"

"Nie so hard nie, Ginny, dis ongeskik om so te wys."

Mevrou Weasley glimlag vir hulle.

"'n Besige jaar?" vra sy.

"Baie," sê Harry. "Dankie vir die trui en die lekkergoed, mev. Weasley."

"Dis 'n plesier, kind."

"Is jy reg?"

Dis oom Vernon, nog steeds pers in die gesig, nog steeds met 'n moestas en nog steeds omgekrap oor Harry wat met 'n uil in 'n hok rondloop op 'n stasie vol gewone mense. Agter hom staan tant Petunia en Dudley, wat doodverskrik lyk toe hy vir Harry sien.

"Julle moet Harry se familie wees!" sê mev. Weasley.

"So op 'n manier, ja," sê oom Vernon. "Opskud, seun, ons het nie die hele dag tyd nie." Hy stap aan.

Harry talm net lank genoeg om 'n laaste woordjie met Ron en Hermien in te kry.

"Sien julle dan in die vakansie."

"Hoop jy het – h'm – 'n lekker vakansie," sê Hermien en kyk oom Vernon onseker agterna, geskok dat iemand so onplesierig kan wees.

“O, ek sal,” sê Harry en hulle is verbaas oor die glimlag wat oor sy gesig sprei. “*Hulle* weet nie dat ons nie toorkunsies by die huis mag gebruik nie. Hierdie somer gaan ek sommer baie pret met Dudley hê . . .”